

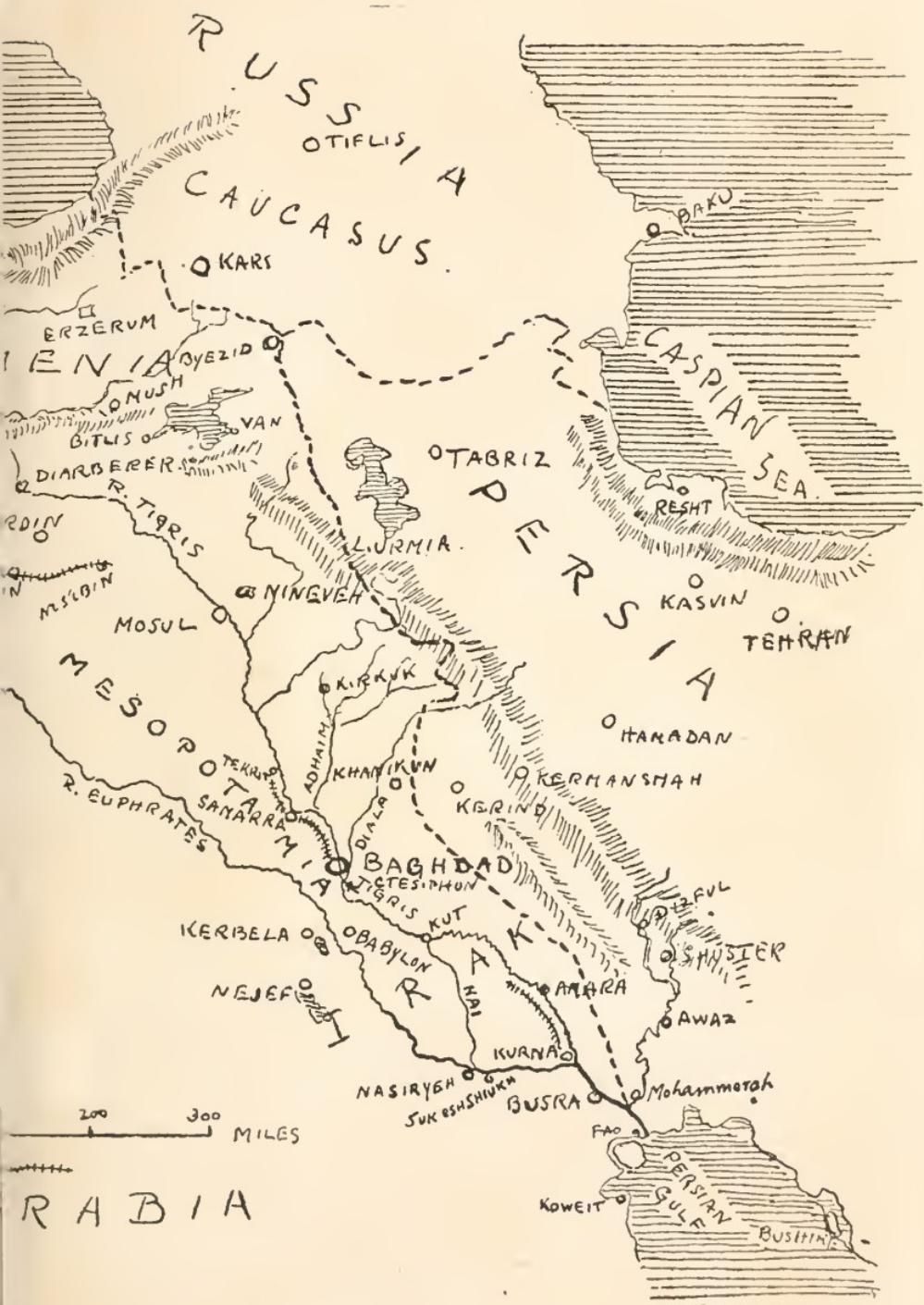
# BESIEGED IN KUT —



— AND AFTER



GENERAL MAP OF



R A B I A

TIC TURKEY.



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Besieged in Kut—and After





[From a Sketch.]



The Port of Busra, looking down-stream from Hospital roof, August 1915. Officers' Hospital in right foreground.

Hutted Hospital in middle distance.

# Besieged in Kut and After

BY

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I.M.S.

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS*

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# Besieged in Kut—and After.

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## I.

THE RIVER JOURNEY—BUSRA TO AMARAH.

TEN months of monotonous overwork at the Base, finishing up with an appalling hot weather amongst the floods, had made us all soul-weary and “fed up” with life in general, so that the prospect of moving nearer to the Front and the glorious uncertainty of the future higher up the old, old river were doubly welcome.

Mobilising our men and material, pack-

A

ing up all the extras we could get hold of, and handing over our responsibilities to others, were a wonderful tonic to our stale and tired brains; whilst over all lay the sense of coming events, of the imminence of another battle, the anticipation of which sent the blood coursing more swiftly and sentiently through our veins, bringing with it a feeling of elation and of the joy of life. Guns and horses, mules and men, carts and stores were being pushed up in boat after boat, barge upon barge; whilst we at the hospital, watching them go by, went with them in our hearts, and with our lips grumbled at our own inactivity and chafed at our delay. But some of us, at least, were soon to press hard on their heels, with the chance of sharing in whatever was going forward.

A game or two of strenuous football on

the dusty parade-ground of the old Turkish barracks was a welcome relaxation in those last days of waiting. Little did we guess that in a few short weeks half the gallant regiment we played with would be lying with loosened knees on the field of Ctesiphon. . . .

When all our stuff was packed and piled ready for loading, we waited with such patience as we could muster for the word to move and the transport to take us. Soon the former came, but the latter hung fire. All available transport was being used for troops and guns. The turn of the medicals would come when a few odd square yards of deck-space fell vacant. But at last a “whole steamer” of microscopic size, big enough for about one-third of our requirements, was provided. This we boarded with some of our personnel and

less of our equipment, and started away merrily on the new jaunt. Could we have foreseen what was to come, and all the horrors of Kut that lay before us, we should have commenced our journey with very different feelings. How different was to be the return of a small fraction of our party nearly a year later, and with what an experience behind us!

As it was, our departure was invested with all the glamour of a launch into the unknown; a fresh chapter of our part in the great adventure was opening.

At ten o'clock on a bright morning we cast off from the little wooden jetty with a nod and a hand-shake with old associates, and started away up the splendid reach of the river which stretches between Busra and Kurna.

Lined on both sides by deep groves of

graceful palms down to the water's edge, the broad majestic river presented a fine sight. The palms formed a beautiful monochrome study, from the light bright green of the upper fronds, reflecting the brilliant sunlight, to the dark and sombre hues of the shaded aisles beneath. This underworld of the palm groves, especially when the floods are high enough to cover entirely the ground beneath, forms a beautiful picture. It is a vast and beautiful cathedral, with its thousands of columns of sepia brown boles supporting a gothic roof of luscious green. The trunks are arranged in parallel rows, which thus form innumerable cloisters and aisles stretching away in all directions until they are lost in the distant background of velvety green. Here and there rays of sunlight pierce the rich canopy, and show up in a thousand reflec-

tions the warm brown smoothness of the liquid floor that is spread like polished marble beneath. A Cathedral! Nay, rather a gorgeous hall of audience beloved of the Eastern monarch. 'Twere easy to people it with its natural complement of courtiers and slaves, its ambassadors and merchants, its beggars and its suppliants at the throne of a mighty despot.

Passing from dreams to realities, we wonder at and try to calculate the wealth represented by these millions of generous date-bearing trees, which for over a hundred miles line both sides of the Shatt-el-Arab to a depth of a thousand yards. If each tree produce ten shillings' worth of dates per annum for seventy years, and there are so many million of trees, what revenue will be derived from the Busra Vilayet?

We have become fond of the palm. She is Mesopotamia, so far as we have seen it,—we have watched her and her mate quiescent during the winter, blossoming forth with flowers and new foliage in the spring, have noted the process of fertilisation guided and controlled by her human owners; watched the formation of the fruit whilst her huge and graceful leaves spread themselves in their richness and pride; and finally, have awaited with ever-increasing curiosity the ripening of the generous fruit hanging in great golden bunches from her neck. Borne down with the weight and wealth of the fruit, exhausted by their wonderful effort, these god-sent trees lose their gloss and colour; their lower leaves wither and brown, they look worn and bedraggled, they retire to rest for another winter, and care not how their human

taskmasters dispose of their progeny. They have done their work ; they have earned their rest. Their fruit does not, however, represent their only usefulness. The lighter parts of the old frond are used for making matting, which forms the floors and the walls of many a poor dwelling, whilst the stem of the leaf, tough and strong, serves the hundred purposes to which stout sticks are put—the base of the old leaf is the staple firewood, and the trunks of the old trees are seen in many a rustic bridge over irrigation channels, and form the props or beams of many a house. No part of the palm is lost, nothing is wasted.

We reached Kurna after dark. Passing by the mouth of the mighty Euphrates, we anchored off the middle of the little town. We could see nothing but a subdued light here and there below the dim outline of the

house roofs. A hail and an answer, a few short orders, and we take up our final position for the night. Are we near the Garden of Eden? What will it look like by the light of day? We pass a miserable night, for the sand-fly is in his myriads and neglecteth not his opportunity of taking his fill of the blood of the soldier-men who sprawl on the upper deck. I can quite imagine that the sand-fly was one of the first of the exterior pests to attack our first parents when they were driven forth, and that Adam at least made a remark that can easily be understood by those who have made the acquaintance of the little beast.

But joy cometh in the morning, and soon after the sun was up we were ashore with the object of climbing the look-out tower and so getting a bird's-eye view of the country round and of the confluence of the

two ancient rivers. The tower, built by the R.E., was 180 feet high, and the climbing of it by ladders served as a good appetite-raiser for breakfast.

From its top, which was once hit by a shell, a splendid panorama of the surrounding country is spread before one. To the south-east the stately Shatt-el-Arab, with its palm-covered banks, stretches away into the haze to Busra; to the west the Euphrates, the very name of which makes one pause and dream for a moment amongst the fascinations of Biblical history, winds away towards Nasiriyeh and the shallow lake. At one's feet lies the mud village of Kurna, and the Tigris with its boat-bridge and the site of the Turkish boom, which we broke with our ships a few short months ago; across the river another clump of palms; all else, desert, which begins abruptly at the fringe of the palm groves and

stretches away as far as the eye can reach. To the north the Tigris wanders along like a silver streak, through illimitable barrenness of sand and marsh, to the distant horizon, or is lost in a flickering mirage. Take away these little ribbons of life-giving water, and nothing is left—nothing, nothing. Easily can one understand the Oriental's love of a garden, a retreat, green and well watered, filled with delicious fruit, perfumed with the sweet odours of a thousand flowers, where trickling water, clear as crystal, lulls one's senses to languorous repose; a shady refuge walled around, and protected both from the cruelty of the blistering sun and from the irritation of the blinding dust. Small wonder that his ideal of a happy dwelling should be the very antithesis of his sun-baked desert country.

Descending to earth, I went in search of

Lancelot, and then for breakfast to the sylvan quarters of some friends who were stationed here. Eaten up by sand-flies and plagued by mosquitoes in their reed huts amongst the palms and village houses, they had dragged on a weary existence through the long months of a wicked hot weather, and were heartily sick of it. Busra is bad in the hot weather, but Kurna is probably the worst spot on the river—always moist, save when the “Shamāl” blows well, the heat may be anything up to  $123^{\circ}$  for weeks. Combine this with insect pests and a monotonous existence, and you have a terrestrial hell wherein life has no charms.

The huts and hospital wards and barracks were constructed of walls of dried reeds from the marshes, in crossed layers or in bundles, roofed over with the same material, which afforded good protection from the

sun. A large number of sick had been accommodated in these at one time, but they were now nearly empty.

Breakfast over, we boarded our little stern-wheeler, and watched another "maha-la" being made fast to our remaining free side. This carried a surveying party under Major L—— of the R.E., who had put a roof on it and turned the waist of it into a tolerably comfortable residence, and we were glad to get on board now and again to talk and smoke. Thus squeezed between two heavy mahelas, our gallant little craft struggled gamely on, and made about three knots against the stream. The time passed pleasantly enough. It was good to sit well forward on the little bridge and enjoy our idleness and the desert air.

Palm-trees were soon left behind, and the landscape for miles offered nothing better

than a few scraggy crops on the river banks. Away from the banks the ground sloped gently downwards, and fell into widespread areas of reeds and marsh. An occasional flight of duck was met with, and sometimes a few teal would settle on the water ahead of us, only to get up again on our approach and carefully keep out of range. Humans were scarce, but from time to time we came upon a watch-tower built four-square of mud-dried bricks, whilst beside it nestled a few reed huts or rude cloth tents of a family or two of miserable nomads, or of the watchman's people, with their brats and their ponies, their dogs and chickens. Here and there, as you go up the river, you see the tomb of some holy man whose monument it is—some village Jacob or local prophet. Their invariable and only form is that of a dome surmounting a square platform or



All that remained of the Turkish gunboat *Marmorice* when the Navy had done with it. On the Tigris, 1915.



Watch-tower and reed huts on bank of the Tigris.



plinth, the whole built upon a low mound, and made of the same material and of the same tint as the surrounding dust-coloured silt. By its side is sometimes a lean-to or mud hut, with its tiny doorway, wherein may live the caretaker of the shrine.

Though a little hot at midday, the weather in this mid-October was delightfully clear and bright, and the breeze we made was enough to keep away the fly and other biting beasts.

Sketching and dozing were the order of the day, and we felt we could do with a large dose of such an existence. The course of the river is extraordinarily tortuous, winding to right and to left—now going northward, and now bending back in an almost complete loop to the south—mile after mile, and the scene does not change. Dotted about on the plain—some going in

one direction, some in another—the graceful sails of large native cargo-boats are noiselessly moving hither and thither in all directions, like wherries on the Norfolk Broads; but for all one can see of the river beyond the nearest bend, or of the boats themselves, they might very well be a squadron of land yachts engaged in a peaceful regatta race. Far away on the horizon can just be made out the smoke of a distant steamer curling up into the misty blue. Soon we shall meet it, and perhaps get news of the recent battle. Just at sunset we approached Ezra's famous tomb. Standing on the right bank, amidst a clump of palms, its turquoise-blue dome reflecting the glory of the setting sun, it formed as charming a picture as one could wish to see. Coming down the river a year later, I observed a huge rough notice-board that

had been put up quite near the base of the venerable pile, bearing some necessary directions relating to navigation. It seemed to desecrate the ancient sanctity of the holy place.

An hour above the prophet's tomb, we anchored for the night close to the steamer whose smoke we had espied earlier in the day. She had on board a couple of hundred or so wounded from the battle of Kut of a week ago, and was towing a couple of barges containing 400 Turkish prisoners. From her officers on board we got tales of the fight, and, alas! the names of fallen comrades. With the medico in charge, an old friend, we strolled round his Hospital Ship and consulted over one or two bad cases that he was anxious about. His patients were tucked in for the night, and seemed cheery and comfortable. A few

were on camp-beds ; the rest were lying on mattresses or blankets on the deck, and seemed to be well covered up. I remember being struck by the sense of completeness and care that overspread the broad upper deck, and the air of snug repose that seemed, in spite of their situation a hundred miles from anywhere, to lie over the lines of recumbent figures.

The lights were shaded, and many of the patients were already asleep, as, with careful steps and lowered voices, we moved in and out amongst the groups of wounded. The lap, lap of the stream round the paddle-boxes, the howl of the desert jackal, and the general incongruity of our surroundings faded away, and save for the absence of the gentle nurse, we might have been doing a night round in a London Hospital.

The padre gave me sad news of a special chum who had been dangerously wounded, and had been asking for me; but he had been put on the preceding ship, and so we had missed each other.

We were well off the mark at dawn next day, and all went well and as monotonously as usual until midday, when we met a large paddle-boat well grounded on the mud. We had been in sight of her for hours, and guessed her trouble, and could see her making desperate efforts to get off the offending sandbank. As ill-luck would have it, she wrenched herself free just as we were about to pass her, with the result that we collided and got badly mixed up. The free language and forcible remonstrance of the P. boat's skipper were quite lost upon our own captain, who was an Arab of no linguistic attainments. We had

to slip our two mahelas and impotently watch them float away down-stream on the wrong side of our unwieldy antagonist. We just got by ourselves, and forthwith tied up at the bank for the next four hours until we could rescue our helpless boats. The river here is narrow and its submerged sandbanks many. With no way on it, the P. boat and its heavy barges became an unmanageable mass of wood and iron, and it was not long before it swung round so much that the bows of the starboard barge stuck on one bank and the stern of the port one on the other bank, thus blocking the fairway completely. For a time we watched the unfortunate skipper resume his efforts to get clear, ringing the changes on paddles and kedge, donkey-engine and cable, or man-haulage from the banks—a tiring business, and one calculated to try



A Street in Kut.



On the Tigris. A river paddle-boat and two barges laden with  
Turkish prisoners, &c.



the temper of the calmest sailor. Lancelot and I strolled off in different directions, I to inspect a tomb in the vicinity. In doing so, my wanderings took me beyond a slight rise in the ground, which hid me from my faithful staff, whom I met an hour later come out to look for me, armed *cap-à-pie* and anxious as to my whereabouts.

That night we reached the village of Q—— S——, where was a telegraph station and a detachment of Indian infantry as guard. The Arabs here were none too peaceably disposed, and marauders were like to be met with, so we turned in feeling quite prepared to be unpleasantly awakened. Sure enough, in the middle of the night a shot rang out, then another, and another—a dozen in all. They appeared to come from the bank close by, but nothing more happened, and

we were just settling down again when the splash of oars was heard, and a boat came alongside. Out of the darkness a Tommy's clear voice hailed—"Is there an officer on board?" We assured him that there was, and he then proceeded to inform us that one of their number had run amok and chased them all out of their quarters.

"'E went mad, sir, all of a sudden, collared all our rifles, and came for us with the butt—swore 'e'd do for us, and would shoot anybody who came near the place—'e's firin' away now at everything 'e sees, —what are we to do, sir?" "What upset him?" we ask. "Well, sir, 'e got 'old o' two bottles o' whisky, and because we wouldn't drink with 'im, bein' teetotalers, 'e drank the lot himself and went ravin' mad." This solved the problem, and when the three homeless ones

averred that they could double up with the Indian guard for the night, Major L—— advised them to leave the maniac alone and let the spirit do its work. This it did, for quiet soon reigned, and at six o'clock the next morning the culprit was sober, and denied all knowledge of his night's frolic.

Resuming our journey, we soon landed to stretch our legs, and keeping pace with our boats we walked up such birds as there were, and bagged a couple of brace of black partridge, which made a welcome addition to the pot.

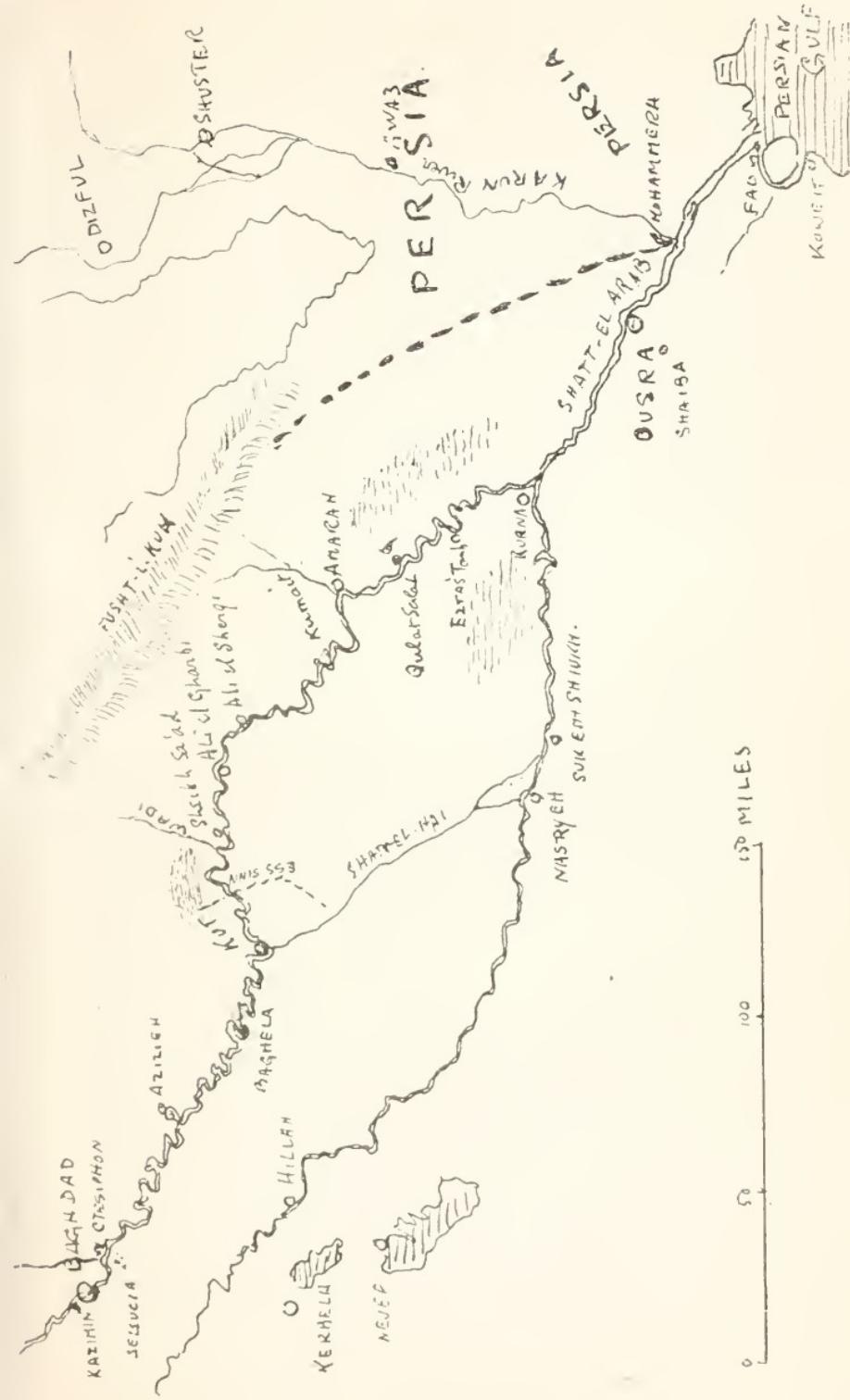
Reaching Amarah just before sunset, we heard to our joy that we were to proceed at once to Kut.

## II.

## AMARAJI TO KUT.

AMARAJI, with its ten or twelve thousand inhabitants, is a well-built town, situated for the most part on the left bank. With its forests of mahela masts on both sides of the broad river, its palms and gardens, and its long, straight row of handsome houses on the river front, the view of the place as you approach it from the S.E. is a pleasing one.

The houses are two-storied, surmounted by a flat roof, with its usual flimsy-looking encircling wall. Most of them have large and handsome bay-windows, pro-



THE TIGRIS TO BAGHDAD.



jecting from the first floor, and made of carved or latticed wood, with generously designed cornices. These first-floor rooms are large and airy, and form ideal quarters, except in the hottest weather.

The Bazar is large and roomy, with a lofty, gabled roof. Save for the absence of glass, it reminded one of our own arcades, though it comprises a whole street. At the river end are a couple of good shops, where European stores are to be had. The late Sultan, it is said, took a special interest in the designing and erection of this town, in which he was personally interested. It is but fifty years old; its population is a mixture of Moslems, Sabæans, Jews, and R.C.'s; it exports grain, and lies at one end of a trade route to Persia.

At Amarah we remained that night and all the next morning. Dropping Major

L—and his survey party, we took on another mahela with two more medicos and their kit, and a few tents for ourselves on loan from another section of our own hospital already established here. Also, we bought stores and food, and had a look round generally. The Arab inhabitants were respectful and seemed anxious to placate our people; the R.E. were very busy with barracks and hospitals.

Off again at midday, we reached Kamait an hour after sunset and anchored. Here our friend the sand-fly was in force and defeated our sleep badly, so we landed early, and keeping pace with our boat, we bagged a brace of partridges and a hare and forgot the miseries of the night. We saw many huge flights of duck and some sand-grouse, but none came within range. The country remained most uninteresting, and a few groups of nomads, with their

flocks of sheep or a herd of camels, were the only relief in a scene of barren desolation.

That night we anchored, most unwisely, within a mile or so of a large herd of these prehistoric beasts. Amongst them were many white camels, which look uglier even than the ordinary sand-coloured ones, if that were possible. Unwise were we, for the smell of the animals, perhaps aided and abetted by that of their equally dirty human attendants, permeates and poisons the sweet desert air for a distance of a couple of miles at least—and there is nothing else like the stink of an “oont.”

Next morning we reached Ali-el-Gharbi, where we found established a strong perimeter camp held by a few companies of the Blankabad Infantry. The “intelligence” officer here cheered us by the information that persistent Bazar rumours had it that a goodly force of Arabs, with

a couple of guns, was manœuvring in the neighbourhood. As these gentlemen had cut up and burnt a large convoy a few days before, it was suggested that we might have trouble. We were therefore advised to fortify our craft as best we could and “clear for action.” As our guard consisted of a lance-corporal and six men, all jungly recruits, this was indeed merry news! but, in the absence of more precise details, there was nothing for it but to get on. We spent the next few hours in putting up breastworks of bundles of tents and hospital boxes and bales, the while we stationed a look-out on the awning above the bridge, which just enabled him to see over the high banks in this portion of the river and get a good view of the surrounding country. Hereabouts the river approaches its nearest to the Pusht-i-Kuh, the western bulwarks

of Persia. Bare and brown and barren, and thirty miles away, these rugged hills are often ravishingly beautiful in their delicate pink at sunrise, or in their hazy mauve and purple gloom at even, when their charms appear as though partly hidden by a diaphanous garment of milky white.

We were not molested, and at nightfall we fell in with a P. boat stuck on the mud, and so anchored close by her for company. At dawn we spent a couple of hours helping to get her off, and then proceeded on our way. Soon we passed Sheikh Sa'ad, a place destined often to be in our thoughts in the near future, and also many a burnt and sunken mahela, half submerged near the banks, eloquent tributes to the work of the marauding Arab force. These wrecks stretched at intervals for miles up the river, and it required no very strong imagination to picture the gallant

little running fight of the escort against a cruel and ruthless enemy in overwhelming odds. But we are nearly at the end of our long, lonely voyage, for next day, soon after sunrise, we make out the solitary minaret and the patch of palms that mean Kut. Another hour, and our syren is uttering its thick and discordant request for the boat bridge to be opened for us to pass through. Just above it we tie up to the bank and await the pilot who shall guide us along the tortuous channels that lie between us and the town. The place seems quite near, so that two of us make a bee-line for the camp, which we can see pitched a little away from it, to find out where we are to dump ourselves down when we do get in. The pilot soon arrives, but it takes us many hours to round the great bend of the river and get to our moorings, and we have but time to land a few stores before darkness sets in.



Fortifying the poop of one of our Mahelas with bundles of tents, &c.,  
Oct. 1915.



The village of Sheikh Sa'ad, river Tigris.



## III.

## KUT BEFORE THE BATTLE OF CTESIPHON.

OUR first impression of Kut was not a pleasing one. Approaching it from the east, almost the first thing that caught the eye was a gibbet—always a gruesome-looking object—and on the dirty, untidy portion of the bank around it, backed by an irregular row of squalid-looking, mud-coloured houses, lay a heterogeneous collection of oil tins, a decrepit native boat, some old Turkish carts, a rubbish-heap, and a wireless station, with a tent or two for the operators : a veritable East End. We slept on board, and with the dawn a gang of Turkish

prisoners was brought down to help us unload and take our stuff to our hospital site a mile away. This was to the north-west of the town, and separated from the river by a grove of palm-trees. Evidences of previous enemy occupation in the shape of bits of old rag, bits of bone, and old tins, were in plenty, and the flies were flourishing both here and elsewhere ; but its aspect was soon changed, and tents were erected.

The S.M.O. was anxious to hand over to us 200 or 300 sick that were clogging his field ambulances, so we did our best to “get a move on.” In the evening the three of us who were fit went over to the Tessex Brigade camp, and heard tales of the recent fight and talk of the coming advance. Our fourth colleague, the “wet bob,” remained in his tent with a fever, which we feared was typhoid, and we sent

him down to Busra a few days later. Most of the division, we heard, had already gone on and encamped at Azizieh, fifty miles ahead, waiting for more troops and munitions, and in touch with the enemy. Kut itself was in a state of great activity, turning itself as rapidly as the water-borne traffic could allow it into an advanced base, and sorting, forwarding, hurrying on ammunition, stores, and equipment of all sorts.

All the principal houses were occupied by the busy gilded staff. Generals there seemed to be in plenty, who were soon to take an unnatural interest in the building of our new hospital, which lay on the road between the town and the camp, and so came in for very frequent visits by the Brass Hats. Our big Base Hospital tents called forth much comment, and it was not long before it was impressed upon us that

such valuable canvas would not be allowed to remain so near the Front. Orders were soon received to have them struck and replaced by huts, so within ten days or so we were taking down our carefully dressed rows of tents and watching the ubiquitous R.E. put up generously designed erections of wood and matting. The work went steadily on, and for the next four or five weeks we had a busy but peaceful time. Every other day or so a convoy of sick and wounded would arrive from Azizieh, and from time to time we sent one down the river, each time depleting our scanty staff. Our own full complement of personnel and equipment rolled up in due course, and the hospital and its work pursued the even tenor of its way. We enjoyed the planning and erection of the different parts of the two hospitals, their wards and storerooms,

operating rooms and dispensaries, kitchens and bathing places, isolation wards and offices.

Troops and hospitals came steadily through us on their way to join the Division at Azizieh, and as time went on the activity on the wharves feverishly increased ; work went on all night by the aid of huge flares on the river bank, which was crowded with perspiring coolies, panting backwards and forwards between huge collections of stores and the iron barges by the bank, shouting S. & T. sergeants, and worried officers, the whole constituting a thrilling but weird and ghostly picture, dimly seen through the dusty atmosphere.

One night those gallant Punjabis, so keen on football at Busra, reached Kut, full of excitement, fearful that they might be too late for the great fight to come.

One of them, Captain T——, lay in hiding in his berth with a temperature of 105°, from an attack of malaria, and trembling with apprehension lest he should be landed and left behind. How greatly I wished he had been, when I saw his poor body laid aside for burial on his return journey a fortnight later !

But they went on and were not too late, and they walked up to the barbed wire as if on manœuvres ; but only some of them got back.

In those days, for relaxation, we would take a gun and stroll out for an hour to bag a few sand-grouse. Of these dove-like birds there are very large numbers ; one could sometimes get them within 100 yards of camp, and could always be sure of a few. At times they fly about in such huge flocks that the noise of their wings

and, even more, their peculiar cry, can be heard for great distances. Some good shooting can be had when they are flying down wind, for then they travel at a great pace. They are best got in the morning, when they are flying around between 8 and 11 o'clock. Or we would explore the town itself. "Kut of the Amir" is situated on the left bank of the Tigris, and built for the most part on the south and south-western part of a very complete loop of the river. East and west of it lie gardens and palm groves; opposite it, on the other bank, is the small mud village of "Woolpress."

In peace time Kut (pronounced Kōōt) is the seat of a small military post, and it ships much grain.

The town itself contains some 5000 inhabitants, mostly Arabs. The majority of the people are Mussulmans; but there are

also Jews, Sabians, and Nestorian Christians. The town consists of an extended river front, perhaps half a mile in length; and back from this and running roughly at right angles to the stream lie a series of streets at various intervals, and running more or less parallel to each other. Cross-streets between these are few and far between and very irregular. On the left, as you face the town from the river, is the Turkish "Serai," with its roomy barrack square, its Headquarters offices, and its flagstaff. Just behind it stands the mosque and the lofty minaret, famous for its graceful proportions and topped by its turquoise dome. To the right of the Serai lie the bazars, the lower and lesser one parallel to the river, the main one at right angles to this. Both are covered in by matting spread over wooden rafters, but are very inferior to

those at Amarah. In the hot weather these sheltered arcades prove a welcome refuge from the fierce rays of the sun, but in winter they are dark and foul, squalid and dirty. On each side of the bazar street is a raised plinth and a row of cubicles, in which the owners squat behind their piles of wares. At night each cubicle is closed by folding wooden doors, which are securely fastened by clumsy iron-padlocked staples, and a night watchman patrols the deserted market, or sits and dozes as the fancy takes him.

Farther to the right, houses and khans stretch away to the garden at the eastern end, whilst between the houses and the river lies a strip of bare, uneven bank, that serves all the purposes of a wharf.

Scattered about here and there, but mostly towards the western end, are a few

good two-storey houses, well built of brick. Each is built four-square around an inner court, upon which open verandahed rooms and the winding stairway to the roof. In the middle of the flagged courtyard is a small drain-hole leading to a large cess-pit underneath, which in very wet weather sometimes gets over-full and is not over-sweet. The poorer houses are merely larger or smaller hovels, built of mud or mud-dried brick, aided by a few poles and pieces of matting. Often several are built around a single courtyard or area, surrounded by an encircling wall, within which are generally an odd palm-tree or two, a drain and a mud oven, common to the community. Here the women sit winnowing or grinding their corn, cooking their “kabaabs,” which resemble thick pancakes, or playing with their grubby and nearly naked children.





Later on, when the siege was in full swing, most of these contained at least one underground dug-out, into which the poor wretches crowded during the worst bombardments. Many of the “short cuts” that were made between the parallel streets passed through these poorer quarters, and enabled one to see something of the family life of these descendants of Ishmael.

With an average depth of a quarter of a mile from the river, the town on the north side ends irregularly on the open plain between the arms of the great loop of the river. Here, in the immediate vicinity of the town, lies a tract of uneven dusty ground covered with the village refuse, rubbish-heaps, dead dogs, and scores of living ones. Just beyond this zone of smelly no man’s land one stumbles on a straggling graveyard, where lie the marks

of those returned to dust. A few hundred yards farther stand up in bold relief a line of brick kilns, like martello towers set to watch over the little town, and only too soon to be used for this purpose on our own behalf.

November was yet young when the riparian activity reached its climax, the generalissimo and his gilded staff departed in a blaze of glory, and Kut was left, it seemed, to desolation and to us. The quiet of the place was painful. The Brigade had left, and but a few companies of infantry and half a dozen guns remained, though small batches of troops and cavalry continued to come through. Also a new and large hospital arrived, with tents enough for 500, and proceeded to settle down beside us. Work on the new Fort by the ferry near the boat-bridge proceeded

steadily, and our hospital grew as near perfection as we could make it with the materials and labour at our command. Our Surgeon-General had seen it and approved, but we hoped it would never be put to a severe test—five or six hundred wounded might perhaps call for accommodation temporarily, but we little expected thousands.

In view of the uncertain attitude of a force of Beni Lam Arabs a few miles away under the hills, we also put in a good deal of work in preparing perimeter breastworks and small trenches around our hospital as part of a local defence scheme, which at one time appeared likely to assume prime importance.

For the rest, we dealt with our convoys, speculated on the date of the coming battle, and waited with a none too sanguine impatience for news of the result.

## IV.

## KUT, AFTER CTESIPHON.

BOOM ! BOOM ! BOOM ! Faintly the sound of distant guns was borne to us on the north wind. It was the 2nd of December, and, tired and hungry, we were sitting down to a late breakfast and talking inconsequently, when the unmistakable sound made us sit up and stare at each other. "By God ! those are guns, F——," said one, and we were up and outside the tent in a second, listening for a repetition of the ominous sound. Boom ! boom ! Yes, there was no doubt about it, and all the tales and rumours

of disaster we had been hearing at intervals for the past ten days suddenly seemed to take concrete form, and the ghastly truth of it all was borne in upon us. We conjured up visions of our struggling, retreating troops being pressed by a relentless foe, and having to fight hard to keep him off.

Boom! boom! they must be eight or ten miles away yet. God! what sort of a time have they had for the last sixty miles if they are still being so pressed within a mile or two of Kut, where they mean to stand? Such the unspoken question that rises unbidden to our lips, and we seem to realise in a flash something of the past ten days' horror through which the old 6th Division has passed.

For a dreadful week we have been struggling to cope with the streams of wounded that have been poured in on

us in shipload after shipload. Night and day have we all been working to tend and to pass on thousands of poor devils, masses of crumpled humanity, until our very souls are sick within us, but nothing has so brought home to us the plight of the struggling army as has this booming of the distant guns.

Never shall I forget those days before the siege when the spectre of disaster walked the air and troubled our dreams, nor the way in which we first heard that anything was wrong.

Soon after the Army Commander had left us to join the division, we had begun to conjecture when the fight would take place. "It will be to-day," we would say. But the morrow would come and still no battle. Then one day, at last, news came that it had commenced; that

our gallant fellows had driven the enemy out of his position ; that he was being pursued. All seemed going well, and we thought of Christmas in Sinbad's City. But the next day a silence, an ominous absence of news—"had they gone on ? were they in Baghdad ?" But no, next day a whispered rumour, like a breath of icy cold wind, struck us dumb, and made us shiver as with an ague. "The enemy," thus it ran, "has retaken the position ; there has been a night attack—heavy casualties—the division is retreating on Azizieh !" Surely 'tis merely a rumour—such cannot happen to us, to those splendid troops who have done so much ! But the rumour is insistent, and presently is strengthened by orders over the wire to us to prepare for large numbers of wounded. Ill news travels

fast; again that icy wind; “the army is retiring.” Again word from our Medical Head—“have evacuated 3500”—the past perfect tense! where the devil shall we put them? We will send some of the boats straight through to Amarah! But the M.T.O. thinks otherwise—only one boat out of six may go through, so all the wounded on the rest must be disembarked and taken to hospital! How we can expand accommodation for 900 into that of 4000 is now the problem. We must have more tents, and tents we get, and start pitching them for dear life. Our staffs respond to our call and work with a will, and our sections grow to the size of a complete unit, whilst the newly-arrived Stationary Hospital becomes a forest of canvas. Soon the rush comes, and we are strained to the utmost; boat

after boat is unloaded ; fetch and carry, accommodate and feed, examine and tend and treat, is the order of the day,—we do our best. Offers of aid by fatigues, or of carts, or in any way they can serve us, are sent in by our friends of the regiment and the battery, whilst a portion of a stranded field ambulance gives of its best. Major Dashwood of the F.A. is everywhere at once, arranging, encouraging, day and night. A huge two-decked derelict barge is commandeered, strewn with S. and T. hay, and hundreds of the slighter cases bedded down therin. Captain Martel establishes a huge “coffee stall” on the bank near the Serai, and with soup and hot milk cheers the hearts of those that are ready to perish. It is a nightmare, a week one hopes never to repeat. On one of the

boats one finds a deck-load of officers, amongst them many familiar faces looking worn and pained; some of them are of those who hurried through Kut a few days ago, "fearing to be late." "And what of the others, old man?" we ask. "Oh! it's dreadful, F——, there are only two of us left; Billy's gone, Jack died yesterday, T—— and M—— this morning. Watson was killed just before the barbed wire." "I? Oh, I had just cut a couple of strands when I was bowled over."

We get to work again with a lump in the throat, and curse all war and violence and the man who started it. The second day we send away a sick convoy down the river, and with them goes the Army Commander and his Staff; but the day following we get another shock, for rumour

hath it that the convoy is held up by Arabs and cannot get through.

Two companies are despatched to help, but twenty-four hours later they return, convoy and all. The same day we hear there is every chance of Kut being attacked by the Arab force which still hovers about, and we improve our defences and arm all who can hold a rifle. The last day of November brings us news that Townshend has detached a brigade, which is hurrying down to Kut, and our convoy, taking all wounded it possibly can, once more essays the passage of the river to Amarah. This time we hear no more, and they get through; but next day, at the urgent request of those who know most, we load every available craft with every patient we can send, and feel that we are on the eve of big events. The atmosphere

is pessimistic—another rumour brings the disquieting news that the detached brigade has been recalled to Townshend,—what does this mean? Is it the beginning of the end, the forerunner of a tragedy? Or will they pull through?

But now the Army, or what is left of it, is nearly here; we are hearing the guns. The “defence officer” runs in and tells us to fall in every man who can stand, and we await events with breathless interest. The guns are silent now, and an hour of suspense passes; but presently out of the dusty distance emerges the head of the retreating column, and we heave a sigh of relief. First of all arrives a mounted officer, bedraggled and overwrought, and craves some food. The while he eats voraciously, his excited tongue gives to us his own picture of the past fast-moving events. Overwrought and un-

strung, he almost babbles his momentous story, and we realise something of the strain our fellows have just undergone. We forthwith set every available cook cooking as he never cooked before, whereby we may help to feed our weary comrades as soon as they arrive. And they soon begin to do so. Guns, cavalry, transport-carts, and stragglers, group by group, appear, dusty and weary, yet cheery withal, and not downhearted. Their ground is allotted, and they are soon sitting about resting and having a snack of food or soup, which we all hasten to give them.

We of Kut are not sorry to see them. For days past we have been existing in lively expectation of being attacked, and having to turn to every man-jack of us, sick or sound, to defend ourselves for our lives' sake, for the Arabs give no quarter.

Now, so do numbers cheer one, we feel

safe again, though we know we must be besieged in this horrible little mud town; and with Pepys we exclaim, “and what shall be the end of it, God knows!”

Another chum arrives, dog-tired and dirty; he has no kit save that on his back. Can I give him breakfast and a shirt? Why not a hot bath first, say I? “My dear chap,” he gasps, “you save my life; I haven’t had my clothes off for ten days!” One after another they roll up, and we are glad to keep our mess-tent and kitchen busy feeding them. They have had practically nothing for three days, and they are ravenous.

Only a portion of the Army, with baggage and waggons, reached Kut on the 2nd December. The main body bivouacked for the night a few miles outside, and marched in unmolested and unruffled on



Townshend's troops just arriving in Kut after the retreat from Ctesiphon.  
Some Indian soldiers resting on their camping ground.



Head of column of Townshend's Army arriving in Kut, December 2, 1915.



the 3rd, and there was a day's peace. It had been a magnificent effort, that splendid retreat on top of a hard-fought battle, and all honour is due to those who made it. Next day digging began in earnest along a line previously prepared from the fort near the ferry, and across the neck of the loop to its western arm.

Fortunately the Turk was dead-beat, and not at all ready to worry us, so that the work went on uninterruptedly for two or three days. In the evening of the 4th, and during the night, there was a good deal of sniping ; the bullets came whizzing over and through our tents, and one unlucky wounded man was again hit in hospital. Some of them seemed to come from the town, and doubtless did so, for it is the way of the Arab to kick those who seem to be getting the worst of it.

## V.

THE TOWN INVESTED, DECEMBER 5, 1915.

ON the 5th December the siege began in earnest, and the enemy was soon busy sending his shrapnel screaming over the western palm grove. As our hospital camp lay just beyond it, we came in for a goodly share of its attentions, and our A.D.M.S. began to look about for another site. That evening our cavalry were sent away: they stole out at night, and got through the incomplete cordon that was drawing in around us; but with their departure the door was shut, and we knew ourselves

invested and cut off from the outside world.

On the 6th the shelling of our camp increased, and it became evident we should have to move. One sweet messenger of death burst over the "wet bob's" tent, and lumps of its case tore through his tent, smashed his box, and landed in his little dug-out. Fortunately he was not in residence at the time, but it made him think; whilst my Indian servant, who was standing by, presently woke up to find himself running round in circles, whereat, when he had recovered, he was intensely amused. Those of us who had never been under shell fire before were inclined to take it very coolly at first. But after being nearly hit once or twice, we developed a healthy respect for an approaching shell, and ceased to take unnecessary risks.

So the Bazar was emptied of its wares and its occupants in double-quick time, and every available sweeper turned on to clean it up. That night, at 8 o'clock, we commenced to move our hospital—lock, stock, patients, and staff—and by 5 A.M. next morning we were installed in our new quarters, and had left for ever the buildings we had erected with so much thought and labour. In a very short time they had been razed to the ground and used for firewood.

Moving house in the dead of night was a weird experience. Fatigues were out of the question, so, with the help of a few S. and T. carts, we did it ourselves. Backwards and forwards, stumbling along over uneven and scarcely known roads and streets in the pitchy darkness, we struggled through the work and wrestled with our heavy stores and equipment. Patients

went first. Giving orders that those who could walk should do so, and start at eight o'clock, and that the rest should be carried, we ate a hasty dinner before taking part in the proceedings. Great was my surprise to find, a few minutes later, that all but a very few of my 300 had discovered their ability to move unaided, and had legged it away to the new refuge. The very few had either broken legs or were semi-moribund. Necessity is sometimes the mother of locomotion.

But we soon discovered that we had quitted the frying-pan merely to fall into the fire. It will be remembered that one portion of the Bazar runs along the river bank, whilst the other lies at right angles to it. Close by, on the bank, was one of the few possible sites for our guns, and three or four were soon established within

a few yards of us. The Turks soon did their utmost to knock these out, and as a natural consequence scored a good many hits on the hospital. Within a very few days we had several casualties, both amongst the wounded and our staff, and our own escapes were narrow and numerous. We realised to our dismay that our Hospital was by no means one of the safest places in Kut, but it was secure from most rifle fire, and there was nowhere else to go, so we had to stick it.

We ourselves got quarters in a tiny Arab house a few yards away, and made ourselves comfortable enough as things went in those days. Other hospitals were no better off. The Field Ambulances found accommodation in various parts of the town, but none could avoid the enemy's shells, and all suffered casualties from time

to time. But during the first two days in our new quarters the artillery duel was of an intermittent and desultory character, and we spent our time "consolidating our position." Everybody was cheery and intensely busy; the trenches grew in depth and the parapets in height; gun emplacements were prepared, and parties of the enemy moving about within range were shelled, just to show them that we were not downhearted. "Woolpress" village across the river was occupied, and its fortification by trench digging and so forth rapidly proceeded with. It was still possible in these first days to go out on the river bank without the certainty of getting sniped—but this immunity did not last long, and five long months were to pass before one could again take the air by the old Tigris. At the river end of the Bazar

a little general store shop still existed with open doors, and all day long had a crowd of eager purchasers, mostly Tommies, around it. Such looked ahead, and thought the time might come when a few extra stores would make a big difference. We secured a few for our own mess, but there came a time when we cursed ourselves bitterly for not exercising more forethought and laying in a larger stock whilst it was still available.

The little store was sold out in a couple of days, and it never opened its shutters again, for the last time I saw it all that remained was a ragged heap of bricks.

On the 9th the Turks got busy and shelled us considerably, and some stretcher-bearers and a “bhiste” were killed in the hospitals. There was a tussle for the boat-bridge, which we held by a detachment on the far side and a force on the hither.

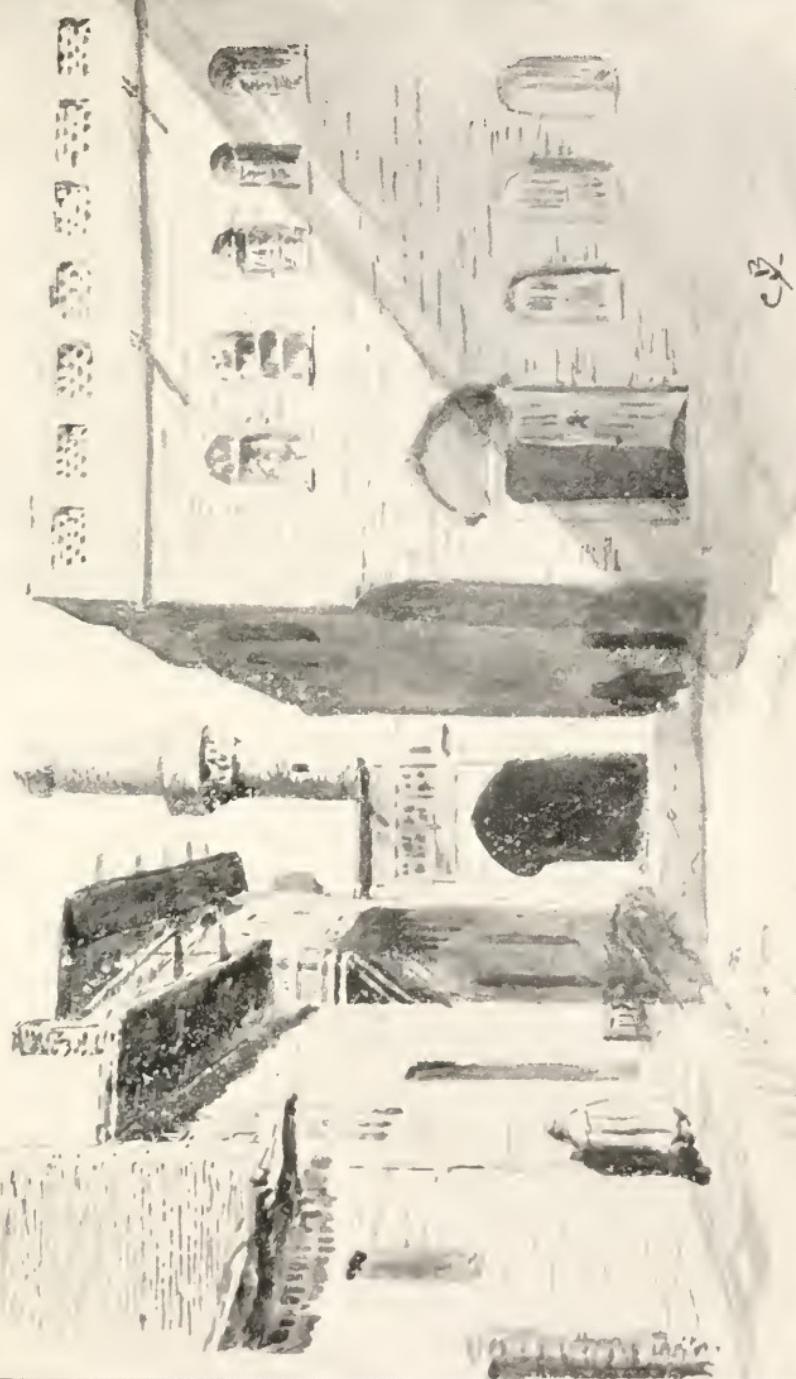
Two officers were killed and lost, and the gallant general of the Blank Brigade made a noble effort to retrieve them that will not be forgotten by those who were there. We heard something of the story—how that alone he rushed across the bridge when he saw his youngsters fall, and endeavoured himself to carry back the one he could reach. That same night a heroic sapper and another swam the river, in itself no mean feat, and blew up the bridge from the far side, under the very noses of the enemy. This was a performance that more than merited the V.C., but, since poor Kut was never relieved, the deed is lost in unjust oblivion.

On the following day old man Turk made five separate attacks on our line, but was beaten off with loss each time, and the shelling of the town grew steadily fiercer.

In the hospitals half a dozen were killed and several wounded. Many of the townspeople were hit,—men, women, and children. So sad was it to see the poor little creatures suffering from ghastly wounds! One little maid was led in to us, actually walking, with a huge shell-wound in the lower part of her back that had wrenched away skin and flesh and bone—yet she lived to become a hospital favourite, and was cured and playing with her companions by the end of March.

Sunrise on the 11th brought with it another fierce attack. In the midst of the pandemonium of shrieking shell and clattering rifle fire, the “muezzin,” the call to prayer of the steadfast Mussulman, rose clear and sweet from high up the minaret, above the din of human strife. One’s thoughts turned heavenward and one won-

Minaret and Gateway of Mosque, Kut, 1915.





dered if *le bon Dieu* were noticing this ignoble squabble amongst the pygmies down below—and, if he noticed, cared!

The hospital again came in for its share; a few were wounded and the roof was set on fire, and we were coming to look upon that sort of thing as part of the day's work. But we had plenty to do without that, for casualties steadily rolled in and kept us hard at our own peculiar and saddening job.

Day by day our foes attacked, and daily did they bombard the wretched town. We had a bad morning on the 13th, for many “whizz-bangs” found their billet in our devoted hospital. One in particular I remember, for it burst close to my office door and wounded four of my hospital staff, two of whom soon died, and could ill be spared. A violent burst was followed by a choking

cloud of fumes and of bricks and dust, through which it was difficult to find the poor moaning “bhiste” who lay huddled up with half his side blown away. We lifted him carefully and laid him aside out of the line that gun was firing on, and soon his spirit fled.

Another shell landed in our little dispensary and smashed half our bottles, and yet another came hurtling through the wall of one of the cubicles and showered its bricks and mortar all over the three poor devils who were lying there. One of these, an Indian sergeant with a broken leg, had the same leg broken again, besides a torn scalp and other wounds. To have our patients thus knocked about made us wild; it did not seem fair for them to have to go through a second mending. My office appearing to act as a magnet,

it seemed to me a good idea to move it; but my little clerk, feeling comfortable and secure in his corner, with a thick wall on one danger side and bales of hay on another, was loath to leave, so I gave in; but when a day or two later another whizz-bang burst on the threshold, I had to insist on transferring it to a healthier spot. Had I not done so, I had not lived to write this, for soon afterwards a “windy Lizzie” landed plumb on the roof and burst within into a thousand pieces.

But we were full of hope and expectation of our early relief. As early as the 8th did our General, in whom we all had sublime faith, send round his first circular to let us know that reinforcements were expected at Sheikh Sa’ad in the following week, and we presumed they would soon make their way up to us, though we gave

them till Christmas or a little longer. Six weeks, we thought, would be the outside limit. But the end of the six weeks was to come and to bring with it the first of a long series of disappointments, which were by far the hardest parts of the siege to bear.

## VI.

DECEMBER 14TH TO 23RD, 1915.

THE next week was full enough of unpleasant incidents, and the weather steadily grew colder. In the early part of it our hospital suffered a sad and serious loss in the deaths of three of our wounded staff, and our Bazar roof was again set on fire by shells. I myself had another narrow escape, but suffered nothing more than a temporary bronchitis from the fumes. Such little accidents were, however, sufficient to enable one to imagine the agony of the "gassed" in Europe, and we thanked God

that Abdul had none of that villainous variety of projectile. One day a group of warrant officers, who were lunching together in their dug-out, was scattered, and killed or maimed by a “windy Lizzie” that landed fairly on the roof and burst amongst them inside. One, more lucky than the rest, was killed outright; two others, or what remained of them, died very soon; but the rest we managed to patch up. Shells are gross and clumsy things, and the wounds they make are terrible. The poor human body has no chance. They bash it, they tear it and mangle it; they wrench away brutally great chunks of it, and leave a battered quivering thing, which to look upon gives one almost physical pain. They are indelicate and beastly in their blind, blundering rage. To the surgeon, such indiscriminate violence is intensely abhorrent; the clumsy

damage to the beautiful, perfected human organism makes his professional spirit wince, and the ruthless disregard of anatomical detail, and the smashing up of nicely balanced interdependent organs, arouses his ire. He sees and pities the poor suffering man,—but more, he imagines and weeps for the hidden molecular shock to the ultimate particles of that bone, muscle, nerve, and brain that but a moment before were instinct with pulsating and marvellous life. At such moments as these the “doctor man” curses all war and the economic necessities that bring it about, and he wonders at all the farcical talk and controversy over explosive and dum-dum bullets whilst the effects of shell fire are tolerated without a murmur. Often he wishes it were his lot to see more of the excitement and glory of the game, and less of the soul-sickening sights

that, in their cumulative effects, weary him to death and sometimes threaten to overwhelm him with depression. Of hard work and innumerable surgical operations there was of course more than enough, and the siege was many days old before we could snatch a few minutes for a "breather" away from the "wards." When I did so it was to take a hurried stroll through the town and around part of its outskirts to the north with the incorrigible Major Dashwood of the Punja Brigade Ambulance, whose chief delight it was in these days to prowl around finding out all the danger zones in the immediate neighbourhood, and then to hale his friends away thither and point them out by personal demonstration.

It was a dreary sight just outside the loopholed walls of the last houses and

gardens. In the foreground a flotsam and jetsam of *débris*, rubbish, a dead horse or mule or two with their legs in the air, an old cart, and a row of gun-limiters sheltering under a wall; in the middle distance the brick kilns, like giant truncated sugar-loaves, standing out boldly above the surrounding plain, and to their left a slight ridge, marking the site of our middle line of trenches. Around the foot of the kilns could be seen a mound or two, and some irregularities in the ground indicating some of our gun-pits, to improve which the gunners were working hard. Two or three of the kilns had been turned into observation towers, and the heads and telescopes of the watchers could just be seen silhouetted above their rims. Yonder, a mile and a half away, the outline of the Fort stood out slightly

on the skyline, and between us and it no sign of life was visible—a sense of desolation brooded over the deserted flat—but the crackling of rifles, the bursting of shells, and the ping of bullets as they passed overhead, or the sharp “pat” of one as it landed on a wall, were conclusive evidence of the activities of the rival forces that had gone to ground. And so back to our little mess of four in a small Arab house in Al Street, there to meet other one or two who have come in to smoke a pipe and exchange the latest “gup.” ’Tis said, we hear, in the Bazar that some of the enemy are trekking away northward. Good news! say we, but why? Are the Russians getting a move on at Kermanshah, or is it a mere canard? The latter, of course, is the truth; but, like drowning men, we eagerly catch at

any straw, and at any rate it serves as food for the endless discussions on the prospects of our relief. But in these days there was little time for talk and discussion, or for aught but hard work. The hospital was full, and casualties steadily came along, either from the shelling or the continuous sniping or from the attacks on the trenches.

Usually at night there was a violent fusilade of rifle fire, and day by day the Turks sapped closer.

The General frequently visited the hospitals, but invariably found us busy in our operating theatre, mending some poor unfortunate, and so passed along. He would smile with the Indians and chat with Tommy, and cheer him up with his own splendid optimism, and every one felt the better for his visits.

The General's dog appeared to have a rooted objection to shells. I was walking with him one day along one of the streets when presently over came a 4-inch and burst with a clatter near by; the little terrier didn't wait for permission, but, much to his master's annoyance and disgust, whisked round, and incontinently skedaddled for home as fast as his legs would carry him, and this habit he could by no means be broken of.

On the 18th our mess was reduced to three, for "Lancelot" went sick and to hospital for a few days, but medical society is a co-operative one by instinct, and there was no lack of offers of help to make up for his loss. The same day witnessed that brilliant little sortie from the trenches by some of our men at the Fort, which resulted in the bayoneting of a good thirty

Turks, and the taking of a few prisoners, with little or no loss to ourselves.

Within a week of Christmas we began to dwell on thoughts of home. What were they thinking of Kut? Did they know yet that we were beleaguered, and were they worrying about us? God forbid! Should we be relieved by Christmas? Some thought so, but the most likely conjecture seemed to be January 10—another three weeks!

Hearing one day that there were a lot of letters of sorts at the post-office still undelivered, Dashwood and I wended our way thither to see. Doleful and dreary were the postmen and their stifled charge; it was bad luck indeed to be boxed up and find themselves out of a job. A few shells and an unhealthy number of snipers' bullets had rendered their first-

floor office, which looked out on the river bank, a most undesirable residence, and there was a goodly litter of unclaimed letters and parcels, mostly addressed to our friends outside, or to those who had already joined the great majority. A parcel of cigarettes was a welcome find, but we got no letters, and went away with our hopes dashed, and a grouch against the fate that interfered with the last mail that should have reached us before the investment.

At dawn on the 20th we awoke to the scream of a shell passing close over the mess and the sound of a brisk fusilade. It resulted in the usual bunch of casualties; two or three were killed in one of the field ambulances, and our water pump hose-pipe was riddled by shrapnel.

One poor devil of a servant sitting

cleaning plates for his master's breakfast got in the way of a shell and lost both his legs, and his life soon afterwards. Some one in some little Indian village would wait in vain for his return, till his name became but a memory of the time when the sahib-log went mad.

Succeeding this outburst came a period of comparative calm, which led up to the great storm on the 24th, and was devoid of incident save for an issue of "strawberry" jam in our ration and for the opening of the wireless for private cables. There was, of course, a rush to send messages, and the good-tempered staff-major, who had lightly undertaken the job of receiving them, found he had let himself in for more work than he bargained for.

But the capacity of the wireless was

limited, and it had to be used with care, so that it took many days for some of the wires to get away. What a blessing that wireless was! Thereby we scored heavily over the besieged of the old days; for though the enemy cordon was drawn tight and all material communication was cut off, yet they could not stop our talking to the outside world, and brief news of the progress of Armageddon, of the doings of our people, of the Relieving Force, and of home affairs, continued to find its way in.

So we got our Reuters—an abbreviated edition, it is true, but still Reuters—and copies were supplied on any old pieces of paper to Heads of units, and were posted up at G.H.Q. They made a great difference to us, for they enabled us to follow the world's events, properly

discounted, to feel ourselves less cut off from all that mattered, and to keep alive the expectancy of early relief.

We of the medical world were faced with an added anxiety, for that bugbear of surgeons, Tetanus, raised its ugly head in a few isolated cases. Confined as we were in a dirty Eastern town, unable to get access to the fresh air, with a lot of animals and with a limited supply of antitoxin, the possibility of a serious extension of this dread disease caused us some unhappy hours. Fortunately our A.D.M.S., with his usual forethought, had already some time before wired for more of the precious fluid to come by aeroplane. The cases remained limited to a few, and to our relief the danger passed.

## VII.

DECEMBER 24TH TO 31ST, 1915.

AFTER a night of incessant firing, Christmas Eve was ushered in by a furious onslaught on the Fort and an intense bombardment of the town, which continued throughout the whole day. A whole division of Turks swarmed around the Fort, and the fighting was fast and furious for hours.

The Fort, situated on the extreme right of our line across the peninsula, close to the river and at the western end of the Mohammed Abdul Hassan bend, was an enclosure some 150 yards

square, at a guess, surrounded by a thick ten-foot-high mud wall. This was loopholed in every direction, and at one angle it projected 20 yards or so to form a bastion. On the internal surface of the walls were fire-steps, and shelters, or barracks, for the garrison. To these were added trenches, traverses, and dug-outs of all sorts and directions. Outside a good deal of barbed wire had been set up, but the enemy had sapped pretty close. Frequent bombardments of the tiny place had knocked it about a good deal, and the violent shelling on Christmas Eve played sad havoc with the walls. But in spite of it all, the gallant garrison put up a great fight, and held the place for England. The Turks did their best to rush it, and came on gallantly in swarms, struggling over the rough ground, stumbling through and

over the wire, and being shot down in hundreds. They reached and took the bastion. Clambering over such walls as were left, they drove our men back and through the second line of defence that had been built across the base of the projection. This was all they could manage, and they were not allowed to stay there for long. A few hours later the gallant Blank and Downshires counter-attacked and drove them out, and no enemy ever set foot therein again until the end of the siege. Abdul had lost very heavily indeed, and he never attempted a similar attack in force. Our own casualties during that fateful 24th were of course considerable, though but a fraction of those sustained by the attacking Turks, which were numbered in thousands.

We in the town had our own particular trouble in the form of a very heavy bombardment, which spoilt the architectural beauties of the place very considerably. The hospitals, as usual, came in for a goodly share. Two sergeants in one hospital and three stretcher-bearers in another were killed and several were wounded, but none was hurt in our own. Amongst other losses in the town that day were three officers whom we could ill spare. Our popular senior gunner was standing with two others on H.Q. roof watching the play of the guns. As luck would have it, a Turkish shell fell right in the middle of the group. Captain Begg was killed outright, the Colonel's leg and elbow were broken, and G——t was also hit. In both cases the wounds were to prove

fatal. In characteristic fashion the great-hearted Colonel refused to be carried below, but, with the aid of a comrade's shoulder, hopped down the winding stair despite the agony of his dangling leg.

His death a few days later cast a gloom over us all, for his genial, hearty spirit was a greatly valued asset.

It was a memorable Christmas Eve, and one none of us is likely easily to forget it. We were ourselves desperately busy. Fortunately Lancelot was back at work again, and "Trixie" and the "wet bob" got through a tremendous amount. The "wet bob" had been unfortunate enough to get back from Busra after his illness just in time to be caught for the siege—a bit of bad luck he is now, I doubt not, bitterly regretting amongst the hills of Asia Minor.

Christmas Day dawned quiet and peaceful, and remained so throughout. No gun was fired, and scarcely a rifle-shot disturbed the almost uncanny silence.

Was it due to exhaustion, or were both sides, we asked ourselves, loath to desecrate by violence the birthday of the Saviour of mankind, the great Prophet of Peace? Be that as it may, the day was calm and extraordinarily restful, and the Padre held his two services without interruption. For the Medicals, of course, there was no rest, and we could get to neither of them. For us of the healing art the aftermath of strife means an abundance of work. It is for us to mitigate, as far as in us lies, the pitiable suffering, and to reconstruct to the best of our power some of the damaged fabric from the brawl of the yesterday.

For our Christmas dinner we had carefully nurtured a duck, bought in the very early days; and Lancelot having likewise carefully preserved a birthday plum-pudding sent him by a fond mother, produced it to match the bird, “so all merrie” after a strenuous day. Our thoughts flew homeward. What were they doing in the old country?—surely at times thinking of beleaguered little Kut, and the boys it contained. Doubtless as we sat around our deal table, covered by a hospital sheet, in a smudgy, squalid Arab cottage, and raised our glasses in silent toast to those we loved, they were doing the same in the cosy rooms of the dear homeland. We had planned a very different celebration of the feast. “Christmas in Baghdad” was often on our lips in the autumn, and visions had been conjured up of festive

boards in the old Caliph's capital. But the reality was "Christmas in Kut," and a very different one at that; and as for Baghdad, our chances of seeing it had gone by the board. "For," said we, "when we are relieved they'll give us a rest, and we shall go down the river, whilst the other fellows go up and get the glory, and the flesh-pots of Sinbad's city." But we were wrong again! We were to see Baghdad without the flesh-pots, and they were destined for many hard knocks.

The 26th was also quiet. The enemy was seen to be moving his guns. Why, we could only conjecture; probably because of the threatening aspect of the weather: the sky was overcast, and rain would render his movements difficult or impossible.

The 28th saw a special order published to let us know that the Relief Force would start from Ali Gharbi on January the 3rd, and a counterblast in the rumour that the Turks were receiving reinforcements. That night was, I remember, rendered hideous by a lot of blind shelling on the part of our enemy. Lying exposed to shell fire at night is an unpleasant business, and mud-brick walls seem but a poor protection against a hurtling 50-lb. missile. You try to doze off, but are intermittently awakened by the “sizzling” scream of an approaching “obus.” You cock up an interested ear to judge whether you are exactly in the line of its flight or not, and if you are, and you have no dug-out, you await its fall with still greater interest, which is equalled by your relief when it bursts

clear or lands with a “wump” in a neighbouring mud-hut. The next evening we had a mild practical demonstration of what happens when you *are* exactly in the line. I had turned in early with bad “growing pains” and a temperature. The others sat in the mess-room close by, with a couple of visitors. A “whizz-bang” came hissing through our mud wall, through the roof of our servants’ quarters, scattering segments right and left, and filling our little courtyard and our rooms with its poisonous fumes. We were out in a second to investigate the damage—they thought it was I who must be done in, but the only casualty was one of the slaves with a bullet in his thigh. Our visitors postponed the telling of their yarns and removed to a healthier spot. These

“whizz-bangs” are annoying little beasts ; they give no warning of their coming, and are on you before you have a chance to move.

Very different was the mode of approach of a new kind of missile our friends over the way sent at us a week or two later. This took the form of a huge, spherical, bronze cannon-ball, about 15 inches in diameter, filled with bullets the size of walnuts. From a short range of a couple of thousand yards or less, it came buzzing over from the far side of the river, for all the world like a huge beetle. It burst on percussion with a loud bang into a thousand fragments, the larger of which could be followed with ease by the naked eye as they sailed through the air like cricket-balls. From collected pieces of the casing, which was

of solid bronze and about an inch in thickness, it was possible to reconstruct the whole sphere, and to imagine the sort of engine of destruction it was fired from. Probably it was some ancient cannon or mortar dug out from a century-old sleep in Baghdad; it was used perhaps in the city's successful defence against the mighty Nadir Shah, near two hundred years ago.

The last few days of the old year passed fairly quietly, save for bursts of firing in the trenches from time to time, a morning and evening "hate," and the everlasting sniping. This accursed sniping took its steady toll of life in the streets of the town and from amongst the water-carriers, who ran down to the edge of the bank at night—and these were mostly women; from our working parties and

from all others who went to and fro; and lastly, and so sadly, from the children as they played. Our own snipers were as constantly at work. They were posted at all points of vantage, mostly on house-tops, and by their efforts kept the enemy's fire within reasonable limits.

New Year's Eve found our own little group none too cheery. We were dog-tired: myself peevish and irritable with fever and muscular rheumatism, three of our colleagues sick, and our hospitals filled to overflowing.

It was getting colder than ever, and pneumonia was becoming serious amongst the troops.

But good news of the Russians filtered through and cheered us up—how they were at Kermanshah, and pressing on to harry the Osmanli. Our own people also, it

seemed, must be nearly ready; another week or so and we should be joining hands with them, and our confinement would be ended. So does hope spring eternal in the human breast—but sometimes, as one expressed it, something goes wrong with the springs!

However, we were seldom depressed. Our third member, "Trixie," was invariably cheerful, and his sunny smile and unfailing good-humour were an invaluable asset to us when the novelty of being besieged wore off and the days grew longer. Our No. 4, like Martha, was troubled about many things, and had little use for sieges.

## VIII.

JANUARY 1ST TO 17TH, 1916.

THE New Year opened quietly, but was scarcely two days old when a virulent bombardment suddenly started late in the afternoon. As luck would have it, our hospital seemed to be specially signalled out for punishment at the hands of some guns placed in a new position straight across the river, to the left of Woolpress village and the liquorice factory. Shell after shell burst in our little grain-selling courtyard behind our main Bazar. Around this covered-in yard were arranged several beds, and opening out of it were little

dark hovels which we had turned into wards with from two to six beds in each. The little round hole in the roof of each we had enlarged for light and air. These formed the Indian officers' wards, after their previous ward in the old coffee-shop by the river, which also formerly accommodated our hospital office, had been evacuated. But in spite of it all no one was seriously hurt, though two men had a most marvellous escape. One "whizz-bang" burst in the doorway of the smallest "ward," in which they were lying, and one of the two had his head within a foot of the door. Though untouched by the shell fragments, his clothes, bed, and blankets were riddled by the iron segments, and the drums of both his ears were burst! The other man, similarly, was not touched, but his water-bottle and belts

hanging near his head were smashed to bits.

Our guns, of course, replied, and added to the din. Within half an hour the enemy's fire slackened and died away, but they had managed to plunk in a couple of hundred messages of hate before they were got under.

On the 3rd we got the first shower of rain, which was to cause us so much discomfort in the near future. It was very cold, and fuel was getting very scarce, but our greatest trouble at this time was the myriads of lice that infested clothes and bedding. Our wretched patients would sit for hours picking them off their blankets and shirts, or rather killing them *in situ*, choosing, if possible, a patch of sunlight to do it in, though this was difficult to find in our covered-in Bazar. We ourselves, too, became, from constant practice,

quite expert in the arts of spotting and catching them. The plague of lice lasted until the beginning of spring, when they almost uncannily disappeared with the coming of the warmth. But hard on their heels marched, or rather jumped, an army of *pulices irritantes*, which, though less numerous than their pale-bodied predecessors, far exceeded them in their agility and biting powers. But it is the way of the East ever to provide each season with its special pest wherewith to irritate and chide its human guests. If it be not lice, then it's fleas, and if not fleas, then mosquitoes; failing mosquitoes, or in addition thereto, the sand-fly is provided. If a much-prayed-for wind springs up and blows them away, it brings with it a dust-storm and chokes you, or it blows so swiftly over a sun-baked desert that it scorches you and heats you till your head

is like to burst. And if for some unaccountable reason none of these pests is in the ascendant, there is always the snake, the centipede, or the scorpion to fall back upon. And over and above all is the common fly, to whom, I suppose, in his myriads, pride of place should be given, for his numbers in the East sometimes are almost incredible to those who have not experienced him, and his persistence wears one out. Never have I felt more grateful to any nation, I think, than to the Japanese when I came across the clock-work fly-catcher which they have introduced. It is good to watch its syrup-smeared cylinder revolving inexorably and taking to their inevitable death thousands of your buzzing enemies.

About this date, too, our fresh meat, of an ordinary kind, gave out, and “bully”

became the order of the day. All these things, however, lost their importance, and were overshadowed by the suspense in which we were held for the next week or two regarding the movements of the Relieving Force. Younghusband's Brigade was supposed to have started from Ali-el-Gharbi (el Gharbi = the west), and we hoped soon to hear of it farther up. Day by day we had seen column after column of Turks going down to Sinn, and doubtless beyond, to meet our fellows, and we knew there must be many thousands of them down there dug in and awaiting our onslaught. We knew, too, they had strengthened their Ess Sinn position, but we never doubted the ability of the Relieving Force to get through, and were quite prepared to see Aylmer and Townshend shaking hands in the time-honoured

way, and according to Cocker, before another ten days had gone by. They told us, too, of greetings from Russia's Grand Duke to our Army Commander, and his expressed hope of meeting him soon in person. Reuters meanwhile talked of some sort of compulsion at home, and of the thousands of bachelors still outside the Colours, and also, worse luck, of the sinking of the *Persia*, doubtless with mails for us on board.

Lancelot now fell sick again, and reduced our mess to three; but the fiery Hepaton, whose quarters were unpleasantly near some of the guns, spent much of his time with us. Poor friend Lambert continued to run a temperature, and developed a lingering typhoidal illness which was to lead him to a much-lamented death. But the work went on; when one dropped out,

those who were left took on his job. One came to realise that no man is essential ; one knew that if he had to lay down his burden and join the great majority, another would take it up and carry on until his turn, may be, came too. Life is immortal, its holders are but temporary.

This first week saw the death of that very gallant gunner Colonel, the genial Irishman whom the whole force loved. In solemn procession we laid him to rest to the fitting sound of guns and snipers' rifles, which mingled their cruel voices with the Padre's solemn tones.

For the cemetery a small field or garden near the outskirts of the town had been set apart. It was enclosed by a low mud wall, and it contained a few scattered palm-trees. Beneath their shade soon grew a rapidly spreading forest of small wooden

crosses, and the padres were never at rest. At the gap in the wall that served as a gate a sentry was placed to guard the sanctity of the place, and to preserve these crosses from the attentions of the village robbers. The loneliness of those we left there always impressed me. I thought of the time to come when Kut would no longer be a bone of contention, nor be garrisoned by British troops. Then we should be obliged to leave them, these many good fellows, to sleep their long sleep away from their native heath and those that loved them ; to turn to dust in alien soil and amongst a hostile people. . . .

One evening Trixie and I strolled forth to look up our Punjabi friends of “soccer” fame. We found them doing their “week in” in a palm grove on the outskirts of the town. Passing the sentry by the hole in

the wall, we came upon their camp. But it resembled a rabbit-warren more than aught else. The whole enclosure was a mass of underground dug-outs, separated by narrow surface paths along which a few of the men were moving about in pursuance of their lawful occasions, but most of them were just coming up out of their holes, booted and spurred and about to fall in.

The Colonel we found in the underground mess—a fairly capacious cavern, with a roof of corrugated iron and sandbags, supported by wooden props. He and a subaltern were the only two left of the original crowd that had brought up a fine regiment two short months ago. We had but time to drink him “good luck” before he was off with his men to take their turn in the trenches. “We’re going into the middle line,” he said; “worse luck!

for they're not half so comfy and safe as the first line; we get all the 'overs' in the middle and lose a good many men. So we do here from snipers' bullets, which are continually dropping amongst us."

Late at night on the 5th there was suddenly a terrific burst of firing—rifle, star-shell, bomb, and gun—so that we thought they must have launched another heavy attack on the first line. It lasted for an hour, and a good many shells were sent into the town also, and then died away. Next morning it appeared that no attack had "materialised." They had either got the "wind up," or merely wished to show us that there were plenty of them still there, in spite of the thousands that had trekked down-river to deal with Aylmer. These nocturnal bursts of firing were events of frequent occurrence, for the two lines of

trenches were now very close to each other—twenty or thirty yards in some places—and both sides were always on the *qui vive*. The Turks often loosed off many thousands of rounds for no apparent reason. Sometimes we replied, but always with one eye on our stock of ammunition.

On the 10th the town suffered another severe “evening hate,” and my new office again narrowly escaped destruction ; but the 40-pounder proved to be a “dud,” and buried itself in the Hospital Quarter-guard opposite. Later on, when doing a night round after “lights out,” I came across three of the guard calmly sleeping over the precious missile, fatefully ignoring, as is the way of these children of the unchanging East, the chance of its changing its mind and blowing them to bits. I carefully preserved one of these “duds” for some

days, in the hope of getting a gunner to draw its fang, but they weren't for it, and advised its speedy removal to the river. So this, to my regret, had to be done, and at the dead of a dark night it was consigned to a watery grave. But the 9th brought us great news, and the town was all agog. The R.F., the Relieving Force, had beaten the enemy at Sheikh Sa'ad, so the report said, the Turks were retreating, and our people were pursuing them, albeit "slowly," owing to the bad going. Although we had had rain and we knew what silt soil was like when it is wet, yet we didn't altogether like that word "slowly"; it suggested "fatigue" and difficulties. And when the evening came and with it a rumour that we were to be put on "half rations," our optimism got a shock and we felt that the success was not

an unqualified one. Next day there was no news, and the weather was vile. It was damp and wet and cold ; the roads, or rather unmade lanes, were indescribably muddy and sloppy, and one slipped, splashed, and slithered rather than walked. There was no fuel save for the barest necessities, the sky was overcast, and the outlook grey and miserable. Our “Lancelot” fell sick again, this time with an illness that was to keep him away from us for nearly three months, and poor Lambert was worse. Huddled up in our thickest clothes, we considered and reconsidered our prospects, conjectured and guessed at what was happening down below ; surmised and supposed, and, generally, went through the first of those periods of trying suspense which we were later to become so familiar with from their frequent repetition.

Restless and stiff, I took a walk to the “East End” by the “A” short cut, to exchange a word with Gasbard and the “Fat Boy” of the Rajputs, who were quartered down there, and to gain their roof, like Sister Anne, and look around.

Of these alley-ways or “short cuts” through the town from east to west, four or five had been made. They were labelled alphabetically. Each one had its appropriate letter stuck up on a board at corners or difficult turns, to keep one to the right track. “A” road passed along the south-west or riverside Bazar throughout its length, and then dived through a maze of “khans,” stables, private houses, and passages, until it ended in the palm grove in the S.E. of the town. It was the weirdest road. The khan, or inn, was a dirty yard surrounded by a verandah,

from which led off rooms or stables as the needs of the moment demanded. Crossing it, you cut across the corner of a small hovel which in these days was used to stable a friendly old flea-bitten Arab pony, whose unhappy death in April, under the orders of the Food Controller, we all lamented. Leaving the stable, you passed through a nondescript court or into the courtyard of the R.E. Headquarters, where, if you nosed about, you would find yourself amongst the bomb-makers, with their jam-tins and old nails ; the mortar manufacturers, the makers of Roman catapults and other improvised engines of destruction, of scaling-ladders and carpentry of all sorts, and a hundred other evidences of the sleepless activity of the engineers. Leaving them you passed through an open piece of ground shielded from transfluvial snipers

by a wall, and full of elaborate dug-outs prepared by the pioneers. Thence the road dipped to cross a weak spot and avoid the attentions of the enemy on the far bank. Up again to ground-level, you passed through some Tommies' quarters, and then dived below one of the main streets. Climbing up on the far side of this you found yourself in the chambers of some Turkish baths, domed and vaulted like a cathedral crypt, and nearly as dark, but now fitfully illuminated by the crude oil lights, or the cooking fires of the Hindu bearers who lived there. Another dip beneath another road brought you to the living-rooms of a house occupied by the Rajputs, and near your journey's end, for across the next street lay the mess and those you came to see. And so up to the flat roof, by the usual winding stair in the

wall of the usual courtyard. The house-top was some twenty-five feet square, and around three sides of it was a four-foot brick wall. On the fourth or eastern side, a palisade of sheet zinc of the same height had been erected, with a few sandbags around its loophole. The walls were loopholed at intervals of three yards or so, for the convenience of our snipers and observers. Two or three snipers were always on duty here. Each sat on a brick or two close by his loophole, with his eye glued to a telescope. Within reach of his hand he had spare ammunition, and by his side lay an accumulating heap of empty cartridge cases. From time to time the short “plock” of a rifle rang out, as one or other of them spotted an exposed head in the trenches opposite, and loosed off at it.

This particular roof was one of the highest in the place, and commanded a good view of the rest of the town and of the river and the country round about. Immediately below, on the river side, lazed the few “mahelas” that still remained in our hands, and straight across the stream was the mouth of the Shatt-el-Hai, that connecting link between Tigris and Euphrates, which it joins near Suk esh-Shiukh, where resides the spiritual head of those followers of John the Baptist, the Sabæans.

At this time of the year “the Hai” is nearly dry, but with the coming of the rains it fills up, and is navigable for large native craft for some months, or until the snow-water flood has died away.

On either side of its mouth, and extending along the bank of the main river nearly

to “Woolpress” or the liquorice factory village, could be made out the Turkish trenches. In them we could just see the Turks and Arabs as they moved about and passed by small gaps in their parapet. Farther up lay the village, occupying a quarter of a mile or so of bank opposite the west end of Kut, and consisting of a hundred or so flat-roofed mud houses and the factory chimney. Beyond it, again, bare river-bank and more trenches. Away to the west, on the skyline, could easily be seen the great white camp of the Turks at Shamran, as well as the masts and funnels of two or three of their boats, including the smart-looking monitor *Firefly*, with its tall “wireless” mast, which we lost at Ctesiphon.

Between their camp and the Sinn ridge on the right bank ran a raised road, and

traffic along it could usually be seen ; sometimes a camel - train, sometimes a straggling column of wounded coming from down below, but always something.

To the north - east the curving river pursued its tortuous way to Megasis Fort and beyond, whilst thirty miles or so away the snow-clad peaks of the Pusht-i-Kuh stood out, milky pink in the evening sunset. Northwards we looked down on a heterogeneous collection of flat house-tops of all shapes and sizes, with here and there a watcher gazing earnestly through a telescope, or an Arab woman busied with domestic duties. Out beyond them, in the middle distance, our gun-pits and the brick kilns, and farther still, the open and deserted plain stretching away to our front line and the Fort.

All this through the loopholes, for it did

not do to show a head above the wall ; the enemy snipers at 500 yards made far too pretty practice at anything showing above the top. But it was good to sit up there for a bit and vie with the sparrows and sand-grouse in their enjoyment of God's good air. Gasbard, too, was a wit of no mean parts, and often wiled away a pleasant hour with his fairy stories and comic anecdotes, so that the roof became a popular resort and a welcome refuge from the *ennui* of the daily round. Often "of an evening," as the weeks went by and the days grew warmer, did we sit there watching the evening hate and the Turks' attempts to hit the guns on the bank below us.

The 11th passed silently, but on the 12th a message told us that it had been a big action at Sheikh Sa'ad ; that the

enemy had lost 4500 men and two guns, as well as prisoners and deserters, and that we were following them up. But in the usual way our own losses were left to the imagination, and we guessed they were not inconsiderable. General Nixon, the message continued, had relinquished the army command through ill health. However, the news that our people had given the Turk a good hard knock cheered us greatly, and one man even drew upon his imagination so far as to see shells bursting over the Ess Sinn position.

The 14th brought us more particulars of the great defeat and retreat of the enemy, and the over-sanguine ones saw the smoke of our ships in the distant east.

All day long a straggling column of the enemy's camels and men passed by, just out of range, on the right bank, on their

way up to Shamran. They appeared to be wounded, and, so, very tangible evidence of a big “strafe” somewhere. Late in the afternoon a column of some 5000 Turks, with guns, was descried in the east, going north-west, so we persuaded ourselves that our deliverance was near, though the Turks, as an antidote, hurled a lot of their spherical shells at us just to show that they were not downhearted.

We were all very cheery, and “Relief” was on every one’s lips,—what mattered it that the rations had sunk to a half and the cruse of oil had failed? An order came out, too, that no Arab was allowed outside his house after 5 P.M., on pain of being shot at sight, and the whole garrison was standing to arms. So the air was tense with excitement, and we waited with what patience we could command for the next

development. But the 15th was silent, and that force of 5000 Turks came down again on the other side of the river. On the 16th it leaked out that our people were only just this side of Wady, had lost a good many in a second battle, and were not likely to get on; and the next day the official blow fell.

D.H.Q. issued a *communiqué* to the effect that, owing to the losses and bad weather, the Relieving Force could not get on, and the troops were exhorted to patience against the arrival of more reinforcements. So we reluctantly came to the conclusion that the end was not in sight, and that it was up to us to go on sticking it for yet a week or two. With a sigh of disappointment and a muttered “damn!” we turned each to his job and “carried on.”

## IX.

JANUARY 18TH TO 26TH.

THE siege, so far as we were concerned, now entered on a second stage. The exhilaration bred of the novelty of being invested had by now worn off, and was succeeded for a time by the dull ache of disappointment at the failure of our people to relieve us after six weeks, and by a period of enhanced discomfort. Our unbounded faith in their capacity to help us was somewhat shaken, and although we felt quite certain of relief in the near future, yet the knowledge that it was

possible for a British Relieving Force to do less than the anxiety of a besieged one had marked out for it to do, served to render our enforced confinement more irritating.

As early as the 10th January rations went down to about two-thirds, though we had not yet started on the battery bulls or the horses. Fuel had become scarce. All the wooden settees, so dear to the coffee-shop *habitués* of Iraq, had been chopped up and burnt, and all the wooden doors of the quondam shops in the Bazar were being pulled down to share the same fate. The usual wood ration now consisted of bits of liquorice root or furze bush or of old doors and beams. Oil was coming to an end, and candles and *ghi* were beginning to be used for illumination purposes.

On the 13th we were on half rations—

bully, rice, butter, jam, dates, and bread,—we might have done worse! and fortunately could not see into the future.

The same day the brick plinths of the Bazar were pulled up and taken away for making defences. Since the Bazar had to be used as a public road, the increased floor-space this gave us was a distinct gain.

That afternoon was typical of many. After the usual round of hospital duties—office work, correspondence, rations, rounds of visits, dressings, and operations—we had gone over for tea, and the Turk started his evening “hate.” As so often happened, a bad case of abdominal wound soon had us back again, and we had to operate in the midst of the “pother.” Several shells dropped round about us as we worked, and one just behind us landed fairly inside one of the little “wards” of the next-door hospital and killed three

patients. Amongst the hiss of our “primus” stove, the sizzle of the steaming steriliser, the clatter of the instruments in enamelled trays, and the smell of the chloroform, the dull thuds of shells as they dropped or burst amidst the walls of the houses, and the tremors of the ground we stood on from their frequent concussions, formed a strange accompaniment to our work in the little mud-walled theatre. We were never sorry when these hates finished, and we could feel that, short of a night exacerbation, we might expect peace for at least a few hours. But from a professional point of view the siege gave the surgeon a rare opportunity of getting his patients very soon after they were hit, of treating them before complications set in, and of watching their progress and the effect of his treatment upon

them, instead of having, as is almost always the lot of the military doctor, to send them along to the Base for some one else to look after.

The next few days it rained steadily, and the lanes of Kut became indescribably filthy. The hospital main Bazar street became a stream; many of the wards leaked, and the patients were miserable and cold. The trenches were abominable, and the Tommies were in some cases up to their waists in liquid mud. The 21st beat all records up to date, and it rained unceasingly. Everybody and everything were wet through, and the roads became troughs of mud. It was a pitiable sight to watch the efforts of the mule transport carts struggling through these quagmires on a dark night,—one often wondered how on earth they ever got to their destina-

tions. The river rose to within a few inches of the top of the bank, and our men were washed out of the front-line trenches. But the Turks were in worse case, and had to evacuate their first, second, and third, and so to retire a thousand yards. Our fellows suffered several casualties through having to get up out of their flooded trenches. The poor lads came in wet and perished with cold, mud-bespattered and dishevelled.

Our own operations were carried on under difficulties, and the rain dripped through our skylight and down our necks. One unfortunate sowar, I remember, came in mortally wounded. He had been hit whilst helping to dig the grave of a comrade who had just been killed. Such is the irony of fate; but what atrocious luck!

The floods set us wondering if the Turks would be washed out of their positions down below, and if the promised assault by the Relieving Force would come off; but though distant guns were heard at dawn, and again at intervals during the day, we were left in ignorance as to the result.

A visit to the house-top gave a splendid view of the swollen river and of the extensive floods. The Hai had become a considerable stream, winding away to meet our people at Nasiriyeh, and the enemy's ships stood out boldly high above the Turkish camp.

The 23rd was a Sunday, and in the evening one went to church. The services were held in an upper room in the "Serai," and in that part of it nearest the river. The room was quite small, but could over-

flow into the padre's private room next door, and so accommodate some fifty people. At one end was a plain table covered by an improvised altar-cloth and a simple ornament or two, the body of the room occupied by a few benches, and by the altar our surpliced padre.—A simple church indeed, but far more impressive than many a mighty cathedral. For, mingled with the priest's solemn tones as he read the prayers for peace were the boom of the enemy's guns and the crack of his snipers' rifles, and it was easier perhaps amidst such surroundings to draw near to the God of Battles and the Prince of Peace.

That day we got in a wounded Turk from the trenches. He was a fine-looking, hefty fellow, phlegmatic and stoical like the rest of his kind. They are men of robust

physique, broad and burly, and of splendid vitality.

In this particular their allies the Arabs vie with them. They take a lot of killing, and, when wounded, recover rapidly from wounds and answer readily to the surgeon's efforts.

The 23rd saw a further reduction in rations, and bread seemed to be giving out ; but we dined friend Hepaton that night, and in his honour broached our last bottle of green gooseberries.

On the 25th the heads of departments met in solemn conclave to consider the state of our supplies ; and on the 26th our suspense regarding the doings of the R.F. was ended for some time, for the General issued a lengthy *communiqué* on the subject, and took at the same time the opportunity of explaining to us all his

strategy of the past few weeks. He thought, perhaps, that such was due to the gallant Division he had led for so long. “The Relieving Force under General Aylmer,” it ran, “has been unsuccessful in its efforts to dislodge the Turks entrenched on the left bank of the river some fourteen miles below the position at Ess Sinn, where we defeated them in September last. . . . Our Relieving Force suffered severe loss, and had very bad weather to contend against; they are entrenched close to the Turkish position.

“More reinforcements are on the way up-river, and I confidently expect to be relieved some day during the first half of the month of February.

“I desire all ranks to know why I decided to make a stand at Kut during our retirement from Ctesiphon. It was because,

as long as we hold Kut, the Turks cannot get their ships, barges, stores, and munitions past this place, and so cannot move down to attack Amarah, and thus we are holding up the whole of the Turkish advance. It also gives time for our reinforcements to come up-river from Busra, and so restore success to our arms.

“It gives time to our allies the Russians, who are now overrunning Persia, to move towards Baghdad, which a large force is now doing. I had a personal message from General Baratoff, in command of the Russian Expeditionary Force in Persia, telling me of his admiration of what you men of the Sixth Division and troops attached have done in the past few months, and telling me of his own progress on the road from Kermanshah towards Baghdad. By standing at Kut I maintain the territory

we have won in the past year at the expense of much blood, commencing with your glorious victory at Shaiba, and thus we maintain the campaign as a glorious one, instead of letting disaster pursue its course down to Amarah, and perhaps beyond.

“I have ample food for eighty-four days, and that is not counting the 3000 animals which can be eaten. When I defended Chitral some twenty years ago we lived well on ‘atta’ and horse-flesh ; but, as I repeat, I expect confidently to be relieved in the first half of the month of February.

“Our duty stands out clear and simple. It is our duty to our Empire, to our beloved King and country, to stand here and hold up the Turkish advance as we are doing now, and with the help of all, heart and soul to me together, we will make this

defence to be remembered in history as a glorious one. All in India and England are watching us now, and are proud of the splendid courage you have shown ; and I tell you, let all remember the glorious defence of Plevna, for that is what is in my mind.

“ I am absolutely calm and confident as to the result. The Turk, though good behind a trench, is of little value in the attack. They have tried it once, and their losses in one night in their attempt on the the Fort were 2000 alone.

“ They have already had very heavy losses from General Aylmer’s musketry and guns, and I have no doubt they have had enough.

“ I have done my duty. You know the result, and whether I was right or not ; and

your name will go down to history as the heroes of Ctesiphon, for heroes you proved yourselves in the battle. I, perhaps by right, should not have told you of the above; but I feel I owe it to you all to speak straight and openly and take you into my confidence, for, God knows, I felt our heavy losses and the sufferings of my poor, brave wounded, and shall remember it as long as I live; and I may truly say that no General I know of has been more loyally obeyed and served than I have been in command of the Sixth Division.

“These words are long, I am afraid, but I speak straight from the heart, and you will see that I have thrown all official-dom overboard. We will succeed—mark my words!—but save your ammunition as if it were gold!”

Thus spake Townshend, and all were pleased with the confidence he placed in them. The talk of “eighty-four days’ ample rations” was rather a bombshell—we were already down to half, and the prospect it held out to us was not an inviting one. But Reuters told us of the Russians’ pressure at Erzerum, and the weather improved. Though we had no vegetables, we were not yet hungry, and all were very fit.

## X.

FEBRUARY 1ST TO 22ND, 1916.

WITH the indefinite postponement of our relief, we settled down with grim determination to last out, and to "wait and see."

February brought us novelty in the form of aeroplanes.

Our friends they threw us papers; our foes they dropped us bombs. But they provided interest and kept us from getting dull. There was always the speculation as to whether an approaching aeroplane was a friend or an enemy. Our people were in the field first and had it all their

own way for a fortnight before "Fritz" appeared. The first thing our airmen dropped was a parcel said to contain much-needed rifle "pull-throughs." Afterwards they dropped a few messages, some rupees for the F.T.C.O., and an occasional bundle of papers. The General and some of the gilded staff received a few letters from time to time, and the S. and T. and one or two others who happened to have friends amongst the flying men also got a batch, but the ordinary man got none. He groused bitterly in consequence as time went on, for it never seemed to strike them down below that we were simply pining for news from our people at home. Daily they came up to see if we were still there, sailed about above us for a bit, and as often went back and left us never a letter. We argued that there must be many letters for us all lying

at Amarah, and thought the least they could do would be to bring us a small mail now and then.

But it was not to be, and so most of us went without news for many months. In my own case it was eleven, which is a long time. However, they dropped us millstones for grinding our corn, for which we were devoutly thankful, and which were absolutely invaluable. The necessary machinery for setting up a mill was found in or near the Fort. There it was dismantled, and although the difficulties in transporting it from there to the town, across the open, were almost insuperable, the R.E.'s and the flying men overcame them in some wonderful manner, and soon a full-fledged flour-mill was grinding away merrily to the music of its belts and pistons. Corn for its maw was none too

plentiful. Albeit a large quantity had recently been unexpectedly discovered, yet more was wanted if we were to hold out. Supplemented by the invaluable aid of Bodd of Lynch's and of old Tom Baxter and Sassoona, thorough house-to-house search was made and more was discovered and bought, but the townspeople were cunning and their hiding-places many. Our own hospital provided a good example. One day some "government agents" came round and deliberately began to make a hole in the end wall of one of our little wards, and lo! beyond it was a considerable chamber full to the brim with large tins of "ghee" or clarified butter. More than three hundred of these four-gallon canisters there were. They had been cachéd by the simple process of "walling up" one end of a long and narrow hovel.

“Ghee” is dear to the heart of the Indian, and this new stock was a godsend. Near by were also two more dens half filled with dirty barley, which was so very dirty and mixed with so much mud and sand, and of such very poor quality, that at first it was looked upon as unfit for food, but there came a time towards the end when even this was roped in and turned into “bread.”

Abdul’s first effort at bombing was made on the 13th—a most suitable date—when to our surprise and chagrin an aeroplane of his flew over us three times and dropped a dozen or more bombs. We didn’t like it. Cooped up in a small mud town we felt rather like rats in a trap, and very helpless against this new form of frightfulness. Your bomb comes down with a vicious scream and bursts with a nasty flame

and an equally unpleasant bang. Sometimes you can watch its flight if the sun catches it and is reflected from its brazen top, and you become expert in deciding whether you are standing in the same vertical plane as is occupied by the aviator.

Alarm gongs, consisting of suspended shell cases, were soon erected on the house-tops in different parts of the town, and look-out men stationed beside them to give us timely warning of the approach of hostile craft. All who could do so were enjoined to get under cover whenever this occurred. Some crawled into dug-outs and some climbed on to roofs, but the favourite places both for safety and observation were the numerous arched-over passages beneath the first floors of the larger houses. Here would collect excited groups of “townees,” chattering and

straining their necks to watch the evolutions of the common enemy.

Sick men in the Officers' Hospital, who couldn't walk, had to be carried below from the first floor to a safer retreat till the danger passed. It was a nuisance, this bombing, and we all heartily cursed it.

Those early days of February were bitterly cold. Once or twice at night the thermometer registered eight degrees or more of frost. Our little mud roof was white with hoar-frost as morning after morning I ran upstairs for fresh air and to note the crop of bullets and shrapnel that had landed thereon during the preceding twenty-four hours.

But they were bright days, and one longed to get outside for exercise in the clear bracing air. Thanks to the floods and the consequent retirement of the Turks

to 1000 yards or more from our own line on the north side, it became possible for a few days to walk out in the open and stretch our legs. But stray bullets were always flying about, and the practice of walking above ground had very soon to be stopped officially. Thus one day we took a walk out to the Pioneers' camp, near the middle line. Partly we wound our way along a communication trench, partly we walked "overland" to avoid the mud. It was good to be out of a trench, to feel one had a right of way on the surface; good to let the eye roam away over the flat to the distant Pusht-i-Kuh. Snow-clad, pure and white, calm and majestic in the still, clean air, the Persian hills reminded one of the Safaid Koh, north of the Khyber, or of the mighty peaks of Kashmir, or of the long white

walls of the Himalayas as you see them from the Indian hills. We wondered what was going on behind that barrier. Was the unrest in Persia increasing? Had the Germanised Mussulman got a firm footing there, or was he a fugitive? The object of our walk was to attend an auction of deceased officers' effects. These auctions, arranged by brother officers, and of which we had many as the siege wore on, were always, to my mind, very sad affairs, though necessary. Prices were always high, but in the later days the simplest articles or stores fetched fabulous prices. This particular auction was held above-ground behind a clump of trees. There was a goodly crowd of fellows there, many of whom we hadn't seen since the siege began, so little opportunity had we had for visiting.

About the 1st of the month the heavy battery bullocks began to be sacrificed, and British troops got half a pound of fresh beef every other day, alternating with a pound of horse-flesh. This arrangement lasted for a little over a fortnight, after which horse-flesh alone was available. Very few of the Indians, unfortunately, would eat either of these kinds of flesh at first, and so handicapped themselves very considerably. There were no fresh vegetables, no sugar and no bacon—a little butter, a little jam—our bread was half-wheaten, half atta or barley, oil was about finished, and wood was scarce. Roofs, doors, and verandahs were being pulled down to supplement the stock. There was a certain amount of ships' coal, mostly dust, and this we mixed with mud and crude oil and made into coal balls, which burnt

indifferently well in improvised tin braziers. We had a ration of dried potato-meal for some weeks, and were able to buy a few quarts of dried beans and peas from the natives. Also in one of the streets the Arabs were allowed to sell such produce as they possessed, and for some time they kept up small supplies of coffee, beans, peas, salt, and of “kabaabs.” “Kabaabs” are a sort of small, thick, sweet pancake, made of flour, ghee, and sugar. Eaten hot, with jam, they are not so bad, and we took to having them for tea as long as the supply lasted. They gave us the extra “bread stuff” which our diminishing cereal ration made a real want; we were not yet hungry and were all pretty fit, but we missed the sugar badly.

On the 2nd an aeroplane dropped some papers in which we read the Turkish

account of Ctesiphon and after, which was of great interest to those who were there. They were pleased to remark that the British commander “fled” to Busra!

A picture paper of some date in January said it had just heard that Townshend had retired to a position at Kut, a “coaling station on the Tigris!” but no one seemed to know that we were very much besieged and had been for weeks, and we felt hurt.

The same day we lost a colleague. A popular doctor was shot through the head by a chance bullet. Fortunately unconscious, he lingered for some days, but died within a week, much regretted by us all. We laid him to rest amongst the palms, and our hearts went out to the little woman we knew he had left behind him.

On the 4th we had a brisk evening bom-

bardment which did very little damage, and some rather disturbing Reuters. Zeppelin raids at home seemed to be becoming serious, and one wondered where one's people were.

However, we of the saw-bones profession were kept too busy to brood over the depressing wires, and our days passed quickly. The usual evening hate took place on the 5th, and a sniper succeeded in hitting one of my patients. The poor wretch was basking in a square yard of sunshine, and picking innumerable lice off his blanket, when a bullet came round some corner and hit him in the leg. He was very depressed over it; said he had no luck in this war. He had lost two brothers in France, and this was the third time he had himself been hit. He had yet to become a prisoner, and God knows

what has become of him now. Could he have foreseen this also, he would have turned his face to the wall and, silently acquiescing in his foreordained fate, would have joined his brethren.

I watched that evening “hate” from the Rajput roof with Gasbard. Coming home, as the sun went down, I came upon a crowd and a commotion at the Serai end of the Bazar. Inquiry elicited the fact that something had collapsed in the first storey of the house they were staring at, and looking up I perceived that the gunners’ eyrie above the old coffee-shop had disappeared, and there was dust and confusion.

It seemed likely that there was work for a “medico,” so I clambered up the gim-crack stairs and groped my way in. Passing through one room I found myself up

against a mound of sandbags in the next. From the midst of this came mutterings and gaspings, laughs and curses, mingled with occasional short sharp orders of some invisible officer, and through the dust and semi-darkness I could make out straining figures pulling and hauling at something underneath. With a heave and a chuckle a something was hauled out, and proved to be a dishevelled and dusty Tommy. The roof had collapsed under the weight of a mass of sandbags which went to form the gunner's directing-post, and had buried several Tommies underneath it—and now their pals were pulling them out from amidst the wreck of poles, matting, and sandbags.

Now a sandbag, when dropped on to your back from a roof eight feet above you, is no light weight, and I quite expected to find some broken arms or legs;

but one by one they were hauled out, and save for bruises and sprains and scratches, they were none the worse, and looked upon it all as a huge joke.

February 6 was distinguished by the reduction of the wood ration to half a pound per man—not much to cook with—and much advice as to how to make use of the crude oil that was about to be issued as fuel.

The 8th was rather a red-letter day, for by some happy chance we secured a small piece of bacon, which made breakfast a possibility for a day or two. Also we were lucky enough to get hold of a few more tins of jam, thanks to the generosity of “Harold” next door, whose Mess by an accident possessed a double supply. These we husbanded with the greatest care. No longer was a tin of jam common property, but each had his own tin, and labelled it

in no uncertain way. Jealously he guarded it, and was ever on the watch against unlawful depredations on the part of others.

Dashwood's Mess of four or five unequal appetites was comic in this respect. If one dropped in at feeding-time, one would find their small table covered with a forest of small tins and things. Each kept separate his own jam, his bit of butter, his box of sugar and tin of milk, at an early stage in the siege, and rigidly adhered to the plan they had adopted.

Our bread now suffered another change for the worse, and was made in thirds of flour, "atta," and barley meal, and it was diminishing in quantity, but was still good "whole-meal" stuff.

The early experiments in the use of the crude ship-oil were amusing enough for those not actually engaged in the trials. The experimenters became "sweeps" in a

very short time, so thick was the smoke, and the hospital kitchen soon resembled a stokehold. But with experience came wisdom. Tall tin or zinc chimneys, supplied by the R.E., were soon erected to carry the fumes outside or above the verandah roofs, where they became more or less innocuous. The liquid fuel was burned in inclined tin troughs, which were covered in by thin sheets wherein holes were cut at intervals for cooking-pots to be placed over; the chimney took off from the lower end of the trough. This crude oil saved the situation as far as fuel was concerned, for, despite the utmost efforts of the S. and T., the supply of wood was hopelessly inadequate. One Mess, I remember, found a few old Turkish biscuits. These, made of coarse brown meal and as hard as bricks, burned merrily enough in a home-made brazier, and lasted for a few days.

Possibly, two months later, they regretted the destruction of so little of even such “food”; but the time was cold, and the brazier a godsend to those who were privileged to huddle around it.

That day, too, the General issued a *communiqué*, in which he gave us the news that a Division was to commence embarking in Egypt for “Messypot” on February 10th. We calculated. How much exactly of all arms comprised a Division? How many guns? How many transports will it take to bring it? How many days should we allow for embarkation and the voyage to Busra—for the transhipment to river craft and for the journey up? It would take them a good month, we said. Ye gods! must we wait another month? Heigh-ho! Anyhow they would, we were sure, make certain of it, if we were not relieved before!

The next two days it poured with rain.

Half one of our mess walls came down with a crash, and I slept beneath the roof that night in some expectation of a further collapse.

The roads again became rivers of mud, which nobody enjoyed save the little semi-nude Arab gamins, who, with their one and only garment held high up round the chest, disported their chubby baby limbs with impish glee in the luscious quagmire. Fat as butter, they showed no sign of shortage of food or of fear of the cold. Although we had to feed some hundreds of the inhabitants—many of them gratuitously—few ever showed signs of starvation, even up to the end. This feeding of the people took place at a sort of soup-kitchen across the way, and daily in the early morning our own particular road was blocked up by a hungry multitude.

The rain meant extra work for the R.E.

Night after night did their working parties go tramping by us on their way to the open ground, where they were constructing a new long “bund” to keep Kut dry when the worst floods should come. Night after night they were sniped at, and the early morning almost invariably found an extra case or two in hospital. Hospital life was made miserable by it. Roofs leaked, rafters broke, and walls here and there collapsed, and it was difficult to keep anything clean ; but the patients bore it all with most extraordinary patience, and never groused.

A new sport arose about this time—shooting starlings and sparrows for the “pot.” Of both these species there seemed to be unlimited numbers. Every evening at sunset they came home to roost in clumps of palms, making the while a terrible clatter. Some one discovered how

good “starling pie” was, and it soon became a popular dish so long as atta or potato meal could be obtained. It was at any rate a notable addition to our menu, and a very welcome change from the eternal horse-meat. But one evening a pellet or two happened to hit a famous general, with the result that bird-shooting was limited, by order, to certain restricted areas.

The 11th gave us a “late at night” strafe, but also bequeathed us a dainty “Kirschner,” which Trixie found in an old ‘Sketch.’ “Petite” and redolent of Home and Beauty, she was framed with loving care, and hung in the best light, whence she presided over our scanty board and chased away depression.

We had a hard and fatiguing day on the 12th, for the shelling was more than

usually destructive. It cost us, amongst others, the loss of a valuable medical subordinate and some good gunners. The next day we got our first taste of the enemy's bombs. Three times "Fritz" flew over us, and dropped four or five bombs each time. He didn't do very much damage, but gave us a little extra work.

The bombing coincided with a recrudescence of enemy activity in other ways, so that instead of our "confident expectation" of relief in the first half of February being fulfilled, conditions rather grew worse. The "hates" became more intense, and night bombardments became a regular and annoying feature. We supposed they were trying to wear out our nervous systems. One shell fell in the "bakery," and laid out six members of a most important unit. Sniping increased until you couldn't put a

nose beyond a protecting wall. Many casualties occurred in the streets, and a bullet even managed to burst through our one and only mess window, although our little courtyard was surrounded on all sides by quite high walls. It was a cold or "thandi" bullet, as the Indians say.

There were rumours that the Turks were bringing down H.E., and all those who hadn't done so were enjoined to prepare dug-outs; so we started to dig one in our own place. What H.E. would do to us in that wretched little mud town we didn't like to imagine; common shell and shrapnel and bombs were steadily wrecking it; holes and ruins were all over the place; but H.E.! we should be blown to bits!

The health of the garrison was very good so far, but now scurvy began to

show itself, and, as we had no vegetables, was bound to increase amongst the Indians, who wouldn't eat the fresh meat. Of dates we still had a few, and of dhāl and rice a little, but not enough to keep the disease at bay. We began a garden, but things take time to grow, and we had to look on, as the cases grew more numerous, and to deplore our impotence.

For a day or two we were very busy making Red Cross flags for the guidance of "Fritz." The flat roofs of the East form excellent sites for pegging them down on, and each hospital laid down several in the hope of diverting bombs from the sick and wounded.

About the 17th good news from the outside world reached us, headed by a gracious message from the King-Emperor, telling us of the efforts being made to

relieve us, and of his concern in our welfare. It showed we were after all not forgotten, and bucked us all up. Aylmer let us know that he was not quite ready, but meant to do the job well when he did move.

We heard, too, that he was getting up an extra brigade of artillery. Reuters told us of the fall of Erzerum at the hands of the Russian Bear. We could imagine the gallant Cossacks swarming in on the east as the discomfited Turks streamed out along the roads leading west and south to Erzinjan and Mush. Those Turks had a bad time in Erzerum. We learnt a little about it later on in Baghdad.

But as a set-off against all this good fortune, the Turks gave us h—ll that night, and we had a man killed in hospital. Our new dug-out was several times in

urgent demand. What a damp hole it was!—it radiated dampness. Beetles and slugs and scorpions made it their playground. I often preferred to risk the shells, and Trixie loathed it. One of that night's shells tried hard to deprive us of our medical chief by sailing through his room. Wood and mud and broken glass came tumbling down, but he had retired below, and fortunately missed it all.

The bombing continued, generally in the afternoons. Our own aeroplanes came up in the mornings and often dropped something or other—anything but a “mail.” Occasionally they dropped things into the river, much to our chagrin. Whenever “Fritz” came to bomb us, their snipers always got busy. They had discovered that people were inclined to frequent the roofs, out of curiosity or for safety, for,

short of a direct hit, you were safest there, and they sent a hurricane of lead skimming over the house-tops in the hope of hitting a head. One day they managed in this way to wound one of our Generals.

Our gunners did their best to hit the flying man. Much ingenuity was expended on improvised gun-mountings. One machine-gun near to us was mounted on the rim of a weighted barrel, which served its purpose admirably, but they never appeared to trouble the aeroplane, nor were the enemy gunners any more successful in their efforts to damage ours.

Our own flying men in Kut watched the evolutions of both friend and foe in impotent impatience, for they had no chance of using their own two pets that

rested cold and disconsolate under a tarpaulin without the town.

They spent their time and their mechanical genius in helping the R.E., and in producing inventions to help us along. One of them served us to good purpose by erecting acetylene lights for our operating theatre, which were invaluable.

Late at night on the 21st we were suddenly brought up to concert pitch of expectation once more by getting secret orders for the morrow. We slept in our boots. By five o'clock next morning we were out, and getting all our convalescents together, and armed for "town duty" if necessary. All night the booming of the guns of the R.F. came floating up the river, and as day broke they were still hammering away. Expectant, we stood to and waited. Our men eased, we stood

about in groups in the cold still dawn, conversing in low voices, listening to the distant guns, hoping hard. Hour by hour went by and found us still waiting and tense with excitement.

Was it relief? Would a few hours, or a day or two, see the end of it, and a chance of fresh air and a rest and—our letters? At nine the guns ceased their “grondement”—all was still. At eleven o’clock an aeroplane sailed over us, and flew away again. At three another appeared, and dropped a message. At five the word was passed along to “fall out,” and the tension relaxed. At seven the camp fires of the enemy could be seen near Sinn, apparently undisturbed. At eight a furious rifle fire broke out, and lasted for an hour, and we loosed off a few rounds of the 4.7’s.

Night came, and with it a *communiqué* to let us know that Aylmer's operations were successful—and left it at that. So ended a nerve-straining day, finishing up with glorious uncertainty. The General gave it as his opinion that we should be relieved in a few days, and with that we had to be content, and turned in dog-tired.

## XI.

FEBRUARY 23RD TO MARCH 10TH, 1916.

ALL this left us restless and expectant. It was difficult to settle down again to the daily round, and my evening visits to Gasbard and his gramophone became more frequent. It was good to listen to the stirring strains of the "Marseillaise" or to the old songs of the Homeland. They made one forget the hates, and took me over the seas to the wee "but-an'-ben" and the wee wifie waitin' there—waiting, waiting. How much longer were we to keep her in suspense? No wonder we asked for more needles!

One day I walked out with Trixie to the Fort for the first time since the siege began. By the zigzag and tortuous communication trench, with its frequent traverses, it must have been a matter of two and a half miles before we reached it. We smelt it long before we saw it, and the malodour got stronger as we approached. We knew what it was. . . . We picked up the Machine-Gun Officer on the way, and got him to show us round. Except for the open space in the middle, the place was a maze of trenches and dug-outs, sandbags and loopholes, beams and corrugated iron. Its walls were battered and torn, its bastion a wreck. The M.G.O. explained the fight of Christmas Eve, and pointed out the evidences of the desperate struggle. The bastion was a veritable ruin. The walls

and shelters behind them were no longer separable into their component parts, but were a jumbled-up mass. Barbed wire was straggling about, sheets of corrugated iron here and there were twisted and torn and riddled with holes like a sieve, and the present line of defence spoke eloquently of the haste in which it had been strengthened. Looking through periscopes and taking hasty peeps through loopholes, we could picture to ourselves the furious assault of two months ago. We could see that which we had smelt before. They were hanging in all sorts of grotesque attitudes on the barbed wire—grim and horrible scarecrows—or lying as they fell on the scarp or in the ditch amongst the new green shoots of the grass of early spring. A few yards away were the Turkish trenches, now often

empty. Between theirs and ours the dead men's land looked pathetic and desolate, for none might walk therein.

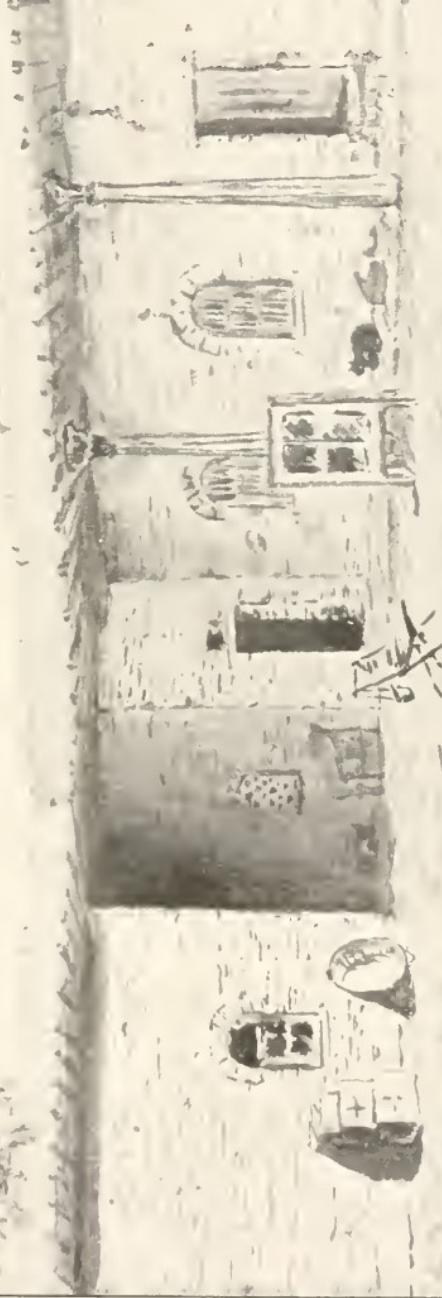
The middle of the Fort was open and deserted; it always attracted, fortunately, a goodly number of the shells during a bombardment. But the Fort had not been worried much of late. The garrison lay out in the sun, and looked fit and well, contrasting most favourably with our etiolated selves from the dens of Kut.

The long walk in the fresh air made us feel life was worth living, and, getting back, we found the R.F. planes had dropped more papers. These, however, contained the casualty lists of Sheikh Sa'ad, and so one had to bid farewell to yet some more of the "Old Brigade" whose names we read there.

Day after day went by, but we heard

[From a Sketch.]

The Mess at Kut, 1916.





no more of the R.F. Optimism still reigned supreme, but the prolonged uncertainty was very trying. The river was higher than ever, and the R.E. went on making things to cross it with. Our diminutive courtyard was becoming a little club, into which most of our medical chums and others would crawl as the sun went down. Alas! there was no bar, and the vermouth had nearly run dry. That meeting for a preprandial hour became a sort of institution. There was O'Grady with his monocle, who had kissed the Blarney Stone, accompanied always by pessimistic Horace, who carried the lamp ; Swingfeld-Myth, our mechanical genius, and his stable companion the Observer ; Mac with his yarns, and Harold with his conscience ; Canning, the photographer, and Martel, the big man with the appetite.

All would stroll in to exchange the latest rumour or freshest anecdote, and kept us from getting dull.

Dashwood would “blow in” energetically, invariably followed by his satellite the Appendicoot. Dashwood had always discovered some terrifying piece of news about H.E. or new Turkish army corps, and “I’m just on my way,” he’d say, “to tell little Penguin. I love to pull his leg.” And having unburdened himself thus far, he would rush off, trailing Appendicoot behind him. Hepaton would look in on his way to the Officers’ Hospital hard by, and smoke a pipe of what passed for tobacco. The “baccy” problem was becoming acute. It was still possible to buy small quantities of half-baked green tobacco leaves from the natives, and the “wet bob” would spend hours damping it with rum

and binding it up into a sailor's "perique." But the baccy soon gave out, and lime leaves, dried and broken up and flavoured with a suspicion of real Navy Cut and a lot of imagination, held the field.

Melliss, the lion-hearted, generally passed by, followed by his two rough terriers. Led by "Betty," these two always dashed in and chivvied the cats. Of cats we had a large collection that lived in and about the mess—black cats and tortoiseshell, tabby and grey Persian in infinite variety. They were fine cats, but it was pathetic to watch them gradually losing their "silk." As time wore on they became a nuisance. Hunger made them bold, and it was all the cook could do to preserve our own scanty rations from their depredations. They sat round and watched him as he prepared our dinner, and made a dash for

dainty morsels whenever he turned his head, but there was always a terrible scuttering on Betty's volcanic approach.

Those evening meetings will linger long in my memory—often they took place during a hate, and on those occasions we huddled the chairs together and sought slight protection under the lee of our cookhouse wall. We talked of the menu, of the chance of leave when it was all over, and of what we would do if we got it, and always of the Relief—the Relief!

We also did our crawls and paid our visits, generally including a few minutes with one or all of the invalids, Lancelot, Lambert, and others—and now Gasbard had joined the band of crocks, but fortunately only temporarily.

Lancelot was so much better that he

began to fear he'd be too well to be invalidated when the relief did come; but he needn't have worried.

The end of the month found us still in suspense. One evening there were several bursts of cheering in the Turkish lines—why, we never knew, and we thought nothing of it. The most likely explanation seemed to be that they had had a “pay day.”

Somebody got up some sweepstakes—three of them—on the date of relief, and we all took tickets—dates up to the 30th of April. The favourite date was about March 10 or 12, and the “draw” took place on the 1st March.

March came in in the traditional manner, like a lion. Its roar was due to a heavy evening strafe from guns and planes, and caused a good many casualties. One bomb

dropped into an Arab house where eight people were sitting. It killed or maimed most of these, and as those who were left and their neighbours were trying to succour them, another bomb dropped in the same spot and reaped another harvest. We had several bad cases in, and were operating throughout the turmoil, but escaped particular molestation by the obuses.

Rations continued to diminish. Dates  $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz., jam 1 oz., no sugar, milk, eggs, butter, or vegetables. Eggs and milk had for long been set aside for the hospitals, and the supply for them was woefully insufficient. Of horse-meat, or camel or mule, we had  $1\frac{1}{4}$  lb., and of bread 12 oz.; a little tea and as much coffee.

Scurvy was rapidly increasing amongst the Indians, saving the Gurkhas, and there was a good deal of pneumonia and con-

sumption. Through these and the casualties there were many deaths daily—a dozen or more, and they mounted up. The worst of the scurvy was that it upset the healing of wounds, and we most anxiously watched the growth of the radishes in Cotton's garden wherewith we might fight it. Very few of the Indians were eating the fresh meat that would have helped them, in spite of a comprehensive routine order issued near the end of February, which explained to them that the holy books of the Hindu religion do not forbid the eating of horse-flesh, and that their spiritual heads had wired to say so.

For a day or two following this breezy advent of March there was comparative peace. We got no news from below, but we could hear their guns from time to time. We lost another good officer at the hands

of the snipers: poor Baillie of the Dorsets, who had come through the whole campaign without a scratch, now met his sudden death as he was walking along a communication trench. These “accidental” losses are so sad. There’s no glory, no excitement; just sheer bad luck! The same day, I remember, occurred another instance of persistent ill-luck that seems to dog some unfortunates. A bright lad in the Binkshires, who had already been wounded on three separate occasions, was sitting on the bottom step of the entrance to a dug-out, chatting to his pals, when a stray bullet found its way down and shot him through the chest. He was “fed up.” “It’s no bloomin’ use,” he grumbled, “they’re set on ’aving me, and they’ve got me all right this time”—and they had.

The weather was still very cold and we had some more rain. The pioneers and

the sanitary squads did their best with the awful roads. One day they would scrape the mud off one side of the street and pile it up on the other. Another day they would dig a deep drain a foot wide and two deep on one side of the lane, use the drier subsoil for the road, and then fill up the ditch with liquid mud. This was all very well so long as you didn't happen to step in it. If you did, you went in over your knees at once. Often at night in the pitchy darkness a transport cart would get one wheel in, and it would take the struggling mules a good half-hour to get out again.

A lot of horses over and above those required for food had to be slaughtered about this time to save the barley they would otherwise consume. And so the population of the horse lines got sparser and sparser, and the shadow of their doom

seemed to hang over the poor beasts that were left. What a shame it seemed to have to “put them away”!

But now we got wind of another impending attempt of the R.F. to relieve us. Fresh schemes for the part the garrison should play as soon as Aylmer got going were constantly being prepared, and by the 6th we were again on tenterhooks of anticipation and suspense.

We were persuaded now that a few more days would set us free. The roof of G.H.Q. became a frequent resort of mine. From it one got the most tantalising sight of huge flocks of sheep grazing contentedly behind the enemy army they were so unsuspectingly rationing. They made one's mouth water, and caused one to realise how caged in we were.

Once more, on the 7th, we got our secret orders for the morrow—more breathless

expectancy—and to be up at 4.30. So we arose in the chilly darkness and turned out and armed our convalescents. The guns of the R.F. began before dawn and we hoped for great things.

Having posted my convalescents and orderlies, I walked away briskly to Dashwood's ambulance to get warm. I found them all booted and spurred and gulping down a "chota hazri." Dashwood and Appendicoot, it appeared, were off to take station just outside the town with the mobile portion of their ambulance, whilst Martel looked after the immovable patients. They were in high spirits at the thought of getting a move on at last, and our blood raced through our veins with the anticipation of exciting events. From the roof we could see nothing, but a violent explosion not far away made us all jump.

The cause of this we discovered later : our engineers had tried to float mines down to the Turks' bridge on the Hai, but they refused to turn in at the mouth, and one of them blew up just off the entrance. At half-past six, as there seemed to be nothing doing, I turned in again to get an hour's sleep. I was becoming a little sceptical about these alarums and excursions, and thought an extra hour would be a useful asset. The long hours of waiting dragged by slowly, and nothing happened until tea-time, when a continuous gun fire started, which we could see as well as hear. For an hour we watched the distant bursts beyond Ess Sinn, but then the Osmanli gave us a very considerable "hate," the results of which kept us busy until nine o'clock. Next day at dawn the guns began again and seemed much nearer. We "bucked up" and went about with a spring

in our walk, but their grumbling ceased at midday, and soon afterwards another disappointment was crystallised in the form of a message : “ Aylmer has not succeeded in his great effort ! ” This was a great shock, and we were not a little depressed.

Hard on the heels of the message followed the visit of a Turkish officer under the white flag. We heard that he had brought a message to our Chief, politely demanding surrender, and intimating that we had done all that could be expected of us.

He was courteous to our interpreters and offered them cigarettes, and the cut of his riding-breeches was beyond reproach.

But the General, of course, as politely refused, and cut down our rations instead.

Bread was reduced by yet another two ounces, a lot more horses were shot, and Townshend squared his jaw and hung on.

On the 10th March he issued the following *communiqué* :—

“As on a former occasion, I take the troops of all ranks into my confidence again.

. . . . .

“We have now stood a three-months’ siege in a manner which has called upon you the praise of our beloved King and our fellow-countrymen in England, Scotland, Ireland, and India, and all this after your brilliant battles of Kut-el-Amara and Ctesiphon and your retirement to Kut, all of which feats of arms are now famous. Since 5th December 1915 you have spent three months of cruel uncertainty, and to all men and all people uncertainty is intolerable. As I say, on the top of all this comes the second failure to relieve us. And I ask you also to give a little sym-

pathy to me who have commanded you in these battles referred to, and who, having come to you as a stranger, now love my command with a depth of feeling I have never known in my life before. When I mention myself, I would also mention the names of the Generals under me, whose names are distinguished in the Army as leaders of men.

“I am speaking to you as I did before, straight from the heart, and, as I say, I ask your sympathy for my feelings, having promised you relief on certain dates on the promise of those ordered to relieve us. Not their fault, no doubt. Do not think that I blame them ; they are giving their lives freely, and deserve our gratitude and admiration. But I want you to help me again, as before. I have asked General Aylmer for the next attempt to bring such numbers as will

break down all resistance and leave no doubt as to the issue. In order then to hold out, I am killing a large number of horses so as to reduce the quantity of grain eaten every day, and I have had to reduce your ration. It is necessary to do this in order to keep our flag flying. I am determined to hold out, and I know you are with me heart and soul."

Next day the Army Commander sent us a message of sympathy in our disappointment, and tried to cheer us up: "Rest assured," he wired, "that we shall not abandon the effort, and that for the next attempt the maximum force will be employed."

So we rested assured, but we were bitterly disappointed.

## XII.

MARCH 11TH TO 25TH.

THE reaction from high hope to bitter disappointment left one rather battered. We, who had seen the river a year ago, were fearful of the effects of more floods, and began to entertain a doubt that Aylmer would be ready to do much more before the snow-water came down and swamped everything. Even now there were rumours that the floods were coming, and, to make matters worse, it rained again heavily. The river had risen to within a few inches of the record, and hundreds of acres of

country were inundated. Beyond our front line was a huge lake, which stretched from the river on the west almost right across the peninsula to the Fort. The Fort, in fact, was for a short time quite cut off. But this lake served the most useful purpose of keeping the Turks at a distance, and so lightened the work of our men. They had, however, to do a lot of digging, and the engineers were incessantly on the alert to keep the water out of the trenches. The men's digging powers, too, were very sensibly decreasing. They found by practical experience that the less potential energy you put into the human machine, the less power you'll get out of it. They "tired" quickly, and had to work in short shifts. The slow starvation was beginning to tell on the body, but the "morale" was not affected.

The possibility of becoming prisoners

obtruded itself upon us at times, but very few ever thought it would come to that. There were a few bets made on the subject, and an odd pessimist or two gave odds against the Relief,—one of these gentlemen got hauled over the coals for his prophetic insight, and for acting in a manner “calculated to cause despondency and alarm amongst troops” (how does the regulation run?) Knowing this, we could not miss the opportunity of pulling Major Boswell’s leg over an inoffensive level bet made long weeks ago. When assured that the General was on his track, his apprehension was pathetic, and he lost no time in cancelling his bet and impressing us with the innocence of the transaction.

On the 13th the 100 went up! a hundred days! Strange how used to things the human becomes! We were used to being besieged, and began to take a pride in the

number of days we were piling up. It looked as if we might vie with Ladysmith, and as the days went on we grew keen to beat her total of 120. There were three or four fellows amongst us who had been there. They said they infinitely preferred their first siege to this one. There they had plenty of room to move about in—could even ride about; there were not many guns against them, and there were no aeroplanes, whilst the climate was good. They had no use for Kut besieged.

There was now no getting over the fact that Aylmer had failed badly, and that it must take time to get ready for another shot. We knew, too, they must be having a pretty bad time in the wet down below. We felt listless and mentally bruised. To work for a bit became an effort. Thanks to the scurvy and the vanishing ration, the

surgeon's hand had often to be held when in normal circumstances it could have healed with certainty. One of the hardest things the doctor had to bear was the sight sometimes of battered humanity beyond the reach of his art, because he could no longer expect Dame Nature to do her part. Large wounds would sometimes begin by showing promise of healing for a few days, but would then stop and progress no further; would bleed when touched, and by their presence react on the enfeebled body that had no energy to deal with them.

At times one wanted to get away from it all, and dreaded the morning round. One longed for nurses and unlimited invalid foods. Fortunately, and thanks to the prescience of the medical storekeeper, we had at first abundant medical and sur-

gical supplies, and we were only now having to start economising.

But the sun was getting more powerful, and the grass began to grow on the plain outside, between the town and the trenches. As often as possible we walked out to the front line to get away from the stale town, from the noise of the snipers and the shells. It was good to sit on the fire-step out there with one's back to the parapet and bask in the spring sunshine; to feast one's eyes on the fresh green carpet of young grass, and to watch the drop of the bullets as they whizzed overhead and landed a hundred yards behind; still better to see the bursts of the "windy Lizzies" in the town, and know one's self well out of reach of their eternal *éclatement*, and free to act the part of distant spectator.

Behind your back you could hear the

gentle lip-lap of tiny wavelets, and a peep through a loophole disclosed the great expanse of flood stretching from a foot or two below the parapet to the group of sand-hills a thousand yards away. . . .

As soon as the herbs of the field grew long enough, parties were sent out at night to cut them. The Indians revelled in it, and many “grass-cuts” went out on their own account day and night. It was touching to see the many friends of the wounded and sick bring to their comrades in hospital presents of green stuff,—grass and weeds of all sorts! All were eagerly roped in, and they sat with pathetic contentment preparing for the pot the nourishment their bodies craved.

Our A.D.M.S., indefatigable as ever, convened a committee of those most likely to know to examine every green thing that

grew, so that things that were poisonous might be readily spotted and avoided. But very few had to be picked out, and the vast majority were boiled up and served as a spinach! It was exceedingly nasty, for we all ate it, but it saved the situation. In a very few days the number of scurvy cases began sensibly to decline, and in a few more its defeat was assured. The vegetable garden, so carefully tended by poor Cotton of the Nth Punjabis, began to justify its existence, and considerable supplies of radish and other “tops” found their way to the hospitals and helped on the good work. To ensure the regular watering of the tender young plants, our gardener-in-chief had a well dug behind the wall which protected his garden from the snipers on the other side of the river, and so he was able to produce a decent crop.

On the 17th the airmen dropped us some saccharine, which was a great boon to those who had a sweet tooth. For a week or two also, hereabouts, we got an issue of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz. of bacon and  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. of butter. It was just a flash in the pan. The S. and T. had taken stock of their last reserves and given us a treat. But on the 19th our barley-bread was down to half a pound, and the jam gave out.

The Turks gave us no rest from their hates, and on the 18th there occurred a shocking accident. After a bad "shelling" their aeroplanes came over, and a bomb dropped plumb in the middle of the British Hospital in the upper part of the Bazar.

Owing to lack of ward room, the fairway of the Bazar road itself was used as a large ward, and there were two rows of beds down the middle. At the time of the

accident there were several men in visiting their chums in hospital, so that there were a good many present in a small area. As ill-luck would have it, the bomb came through the roof and landed on the side wall of the Bazar, with the result that it burst before reaching the ground and sent a shower of wicked metal over the devoted sick beneath. Three or four poor fellows were killed on the spot and thirty others injured; of these a dozen died within the next two days. The place was a shambles.

The wretched victims lay about in all directions amongst the bricks and dust and blood. A couple of doctors were in the hospital at the time, and within five or ten minutes half the rest of us were on the spot.

It was a sad party that staggered home in the small hours of the next morning and sat down to a cold dinner—Trixie and I

and the “wet bob.” We hated all war, and turned in cursing the Kaiser.

The next night we had another and most unpleasant surprise. Through the haze of a troubled sleep I became conscious of a distant buzzing. It sounded like an engine; but thinking I had dreamt it, I turned over to woo the fickle goddess once more. But No! the buzzing grew louder and I more wakeful. A quarter after midnight! Surely it can’t . . . but, by God! it is that infernal Fritz taking a moonlight ride. After yesterday’s experience I knew what that meant, so went up on our little roof to see the terror that flew by night. Louder and louder, nearer and nearer, straight for us came that abominable machine.

With field-glasses I sought to catch sight of it, but, despite the bright moonlight, I could not pick it up.

Nearer still, it seemed as though it must

hit us, so low did it appear to be flying. The calm night air vibrated with the throbbing menace, and then . . . Swish! we were for it. Unconsciously I crouched against the little mud wall,—a mighty bang, and a flash of yellow flame—missed me by fifty yards! Sw-i-s-h, bang! another behind us. Thank God it's gone by! Bang! bang! bang! through the sleeping town. Plague take it! what next? . . . Now he was turning, and the throb of the engine grew louder again as he passed by on his return journey. Would he pay us another visit, or leave us to sleep? It was plucky of him, we admitted, to fly by night, but a poor game to bomb a sleeping town. The object, of course, was to wear us out. A little judicious bombing at night would, they doubtless argued, add considerably to the effects of starvation and frequent bom-

bardments on the morale of the garrison, for “qui dort dine.” But we consigned him to h—ll, and turned in again.

The 21st was worse than ever. The planes bombed us in the small hours, and the guns began at dawn. They sent along over 1000 shells that day; but casualties were not numerous, and only a few fell in the hospitals. The next night was again bad, and forced us to bed down in our “black hole.” In the middle of it all an excited voice shouted down into the dug-out, “Is a doctor there?” “Why, yes,” we say. “What’s wrong?” “Morton’s hit by a shell.” Good Lord! it is but an hour since we walked home together after “taking food” with Dashwood’s lot. Trixie hurried out, and we others followed, prepared for more work. The Turks had got their own back at

last, and landed a shell straight in Morton's den; for he was a gunner of no mean parts, and had given them many a bad five minutes. Now it was their turn, and they got him in the foot. His room was full of bricks and dust and fumes, but Trixie soon fixed him up and moved him to hospital.

The following days were equally vile. Abdul seemed determined to frighten us into submission, but I think he was finding it a costly method.

As for me, I got a cable from Home: all was well, so the world was looking rosier. There was firing, too, down below, and a report went round that the R.F. had taken Hannah. This was a bit premature, but it kept us on the *qui vive* and showed us they were trying again.

## XIII.

MARCH 26TH TO APRIL 11TH.

THE river went on rising during the last days of March, until it reached and passed the record. It came over the banks and washed against the outer walls of the lower Bazar. Looking round the corner of the barricade of earth-filled oil-tins near the old coffee-shop, which was by this time a hopeless ruin, one gazed on a swirling, muddy torrent. Over on the other side, "Woolpress" village just kept its head above water. It seemed to be standing up to its neck in a great lake, so that

the inhabitants looked quite marooned and liable to be washed away at any moment. But they had a much better time than we, and were scarcely ever shelled. Their only link with us was our little warship, the quondam tug *Shutan*, which on most nights steamed across to them with provisions, discharged patients, and so forth, running the gauntlet of snipers, and returning with sick men.

By day she was moored to the bank below the Rajputs—a perpetual target for the Turkish guns. Now and then they hit her, smashing her bridge or holing her funnel; but she was ever undaunted, and continued to do her job cheerily and efficiently to the bitter end.

As the waters rose, our hopes declined. We pictured to ourselves the state of the country down below, and knew it must seriously, if not fatally, delay matters. A

few more inches and the whole country would be inundated; nothing would be seen above the surface save the little group of sand-hills. Surely the legend of the Flood had its origin in this country of the great rivers, and a sand mound was its Ararat!

For many days after the bomb dropped in the hospital we were busily engaged in building partition walls of mud and brick at intervals in the fairway of the Bazar, so as to split it up into very small areas, which would serve to limit the damage should another plane make a mistake and hit us again. Of course it didn't, as a natural consequence, and the sort of maze that was thus constructed increased the cheerlessness of the place.

One day we were startled to hear that "salt" had given out, and we doctors of a physiological turn of mind were very

uneasy. It wasn't quite true, most fortunately, but there was nothing left except horribly dirty stuff that had been obtained from the Arabs, and we had to be content with a few grains each. Some, too, of the remaining stock of barley was found to be unfit for food—it had to be very very bad to be condemned—so the Indian ration was cut down to 10 oz., little enough to keep body and soul together if you have nothing else !

A good deal of amusement was caused about this time by the practice of "swopping" comestibles that came into vogue. The sweet-tooth, for instance, who was the happy possessor of a few ounces of alcohol, would advertise the fact with a view to bargaining with him who was willing to give up his last tin of jam, small packet of maccaroni, or bit of but-

ter. Relative values changed enormously. Nothing could be bought for cash. The only basis was physiological need. The bargaining was often excruciatingly comic, and revealed business instincts in the most unsuspected quarters. I made desperate efforts to "swop" a last bottle of whisky for jam or marmalade, but it was not to be had, and the "craythur" finally went in exchange for tinned milk, two or three tins of which somebody still hung on to.

We were getting very hungry, and belts had to be taken in; the fat kine developed graceful figures, and the lean ones looked more finely-drawn. News came through the General's letters that people at Home were getting interested in us, but we'd got beyond caring much whether they did or not; our thoughts were all on Gorringe and his fight with the floods.

Just before the end of the month we lost poor Lambert, and also another good man who died very suddenly of intestinal trouble. The former had had three long months of illness, and until a few days before his death we hoped he would pull through, but he did not, and joined the great majority. He'd had no fun out of the siege, though his spirit was ever keen and full of hope for the future. The loss of a good friend at such a time touches one up, and I wanted to speak to none that day.

As the curtain came down on March, the flying men dropped a bag of letters into the river! It was maddening! Each thought that there might have been one for him, and groused accordingly, though probably there were but a few for the Staff only.

The next day, conscious of its designation, brought with it a violent thunder-storm and unlimited rain. The very elements seemed to have conspired against us, and to wish to destroy all chance of our relief. The place was soaking. But the Turks managed to move about a bit, and there was more firing below. How they got their camels to keep going on the slippery road was more than astonishing, but long strings of them were often seen moving slowly "over the face of the waters," so to speak.

In the morning there was another sad auction, and prices were high. A box of cigarettes fetched 100 rupees, and many other things went for large sums.

In the afternoon the doctors held a Scientific Medical Meeting. They thought it a pity not to make a collective clinical

study of the diseases which the peculiar conditions of the siege had brought about. Although it rained, most of us turned up, and our interest in the “exhibits” caused us to forget for a time our surroundings, and did us all a lot of good. We moved from hospital to hospital, and engaged in impromptu discussions on the features of interest that were pointed out by those in charge of the cases.

*April 3rd.*—“Felt seedy and slack,” so the diary relates, but we had an idea that things were moving down below. “Turks seen dragging two big guns down to Ess Sinn.” They mean to do their damnedest to stop Gorringe! Also a deluge of hail, with lots of stones an inch in diameter. It was well to get under shelter, for they hurt! To-day the score is 121, so we have beaten Ladysmith.

Yesterday the three heroes of that siege met together, and had a dinner to commemorate their relief on that occasion. Their menu, set in a suitable design, ran something like this—

POTAGE AUX OS DE CHEVAL.

SAUTERELLES SAUTÉS.

STARLINGS EN CANAPÉ.

FILET DE MULE.

ENTRECOTE DE CHAMEAU.

ROGNONS DE CHEVAL À LA DIABLE.

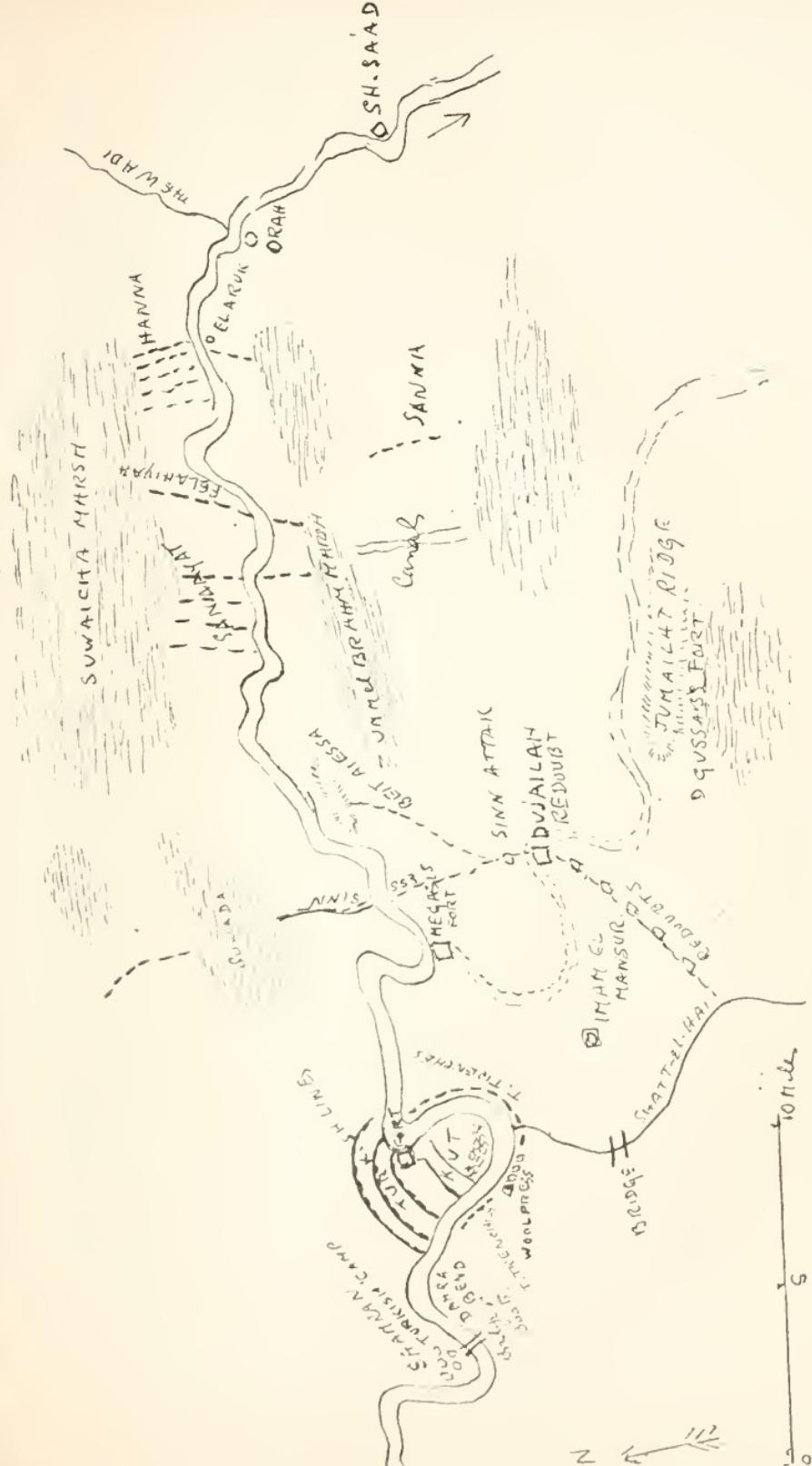
PAIN.

On the 4th, starting at daybreak, they shelled us a good deal, and two officers were knocked out. They probably did it to induce us to keep quiet whilst the rest of them went off to meet the R.F.

The Morrow was a great day. We awoke to the sound of a terrific “gronde-

ment" of the guns down below—the most intense we had yet heard—a continuous roar, that sounded as if they meant business this time. It was still dark, and from the roofs we could see hundreds of "flashes" vivid and quivering in the dark grey of the early morning. As day broke one saw heads on all the roofs, eagerly watching the signs of struggle fifteen miles away. "Harold," whilst doing so, was nearly blown off by a "whizz-bang," but fortunately just escaped.

At 8.30 Gorringe sent up to say he had taken five lines of trenches at Hannah! "Good enough," we thought, and all was merry and bright. As evening came on there was more firing, and we rested our arms on the house-top walls and gazed and gazed through our glasses till our eyes ached. The "flashes" seemed no



THE TIGRIS NEAR KUT, SHOWING POSITIONS OF THE TURKS AND THE RELIEVING FORCE.



nearer, worse luck! We worried the enemy over against Megasis Fort with our 5-inchers, and waited for the morrow. We talked again of getting some leave, of getting out of this godless country for a bit to India's coral strand, and of having a holiday in some nice safe place!

But as if to try our nerves and tempers to the utmost, no news came along for nearly two days, and we began to dread another disappointment, for the sound of the guns grew no nearer. We walked about restless and irritable, unable to sit still, and feverish with the intolerable suspense.

Kut was quiet, save for desultory sniping, and wore an air of desolation and ruin. The gaunt spectre of famine was making itself felt. I walked, to see Gasbard, by the A short cut through the

lower Bazar, where they were pulling down the gabled roof for the sake of its wood, past the Engineers' shops, where nothing was doing, and then I came upon the flour-mill. It was still. The wheels that had so faithfully revolved, the belts that had flapped round them for weeks without a rest, had ceased to move for want of food. I peeped in, but all was silent and deserted. I almost feared to disturb its sleep. But the mill was dead. The darkening shed was chill and uncanny, like a sepulchre. Like everything else, it had the air of having finished. It had done its job, and now its heart had stopped!

Near by, in the little mud yard, grew two tall palms. They were holy palms. Tin labels fixed to the trunks testified to the fact. They were sacred, and spoke of an eternity. Rearing their feathered heads

in silence high above the squalor of the deserted hovels beneath, they seemed to point the way to better things and to pity the sadness and brevity of human life. I pursued my way in a chastened mood, and soon gained the roof to do more gazing.

The afternoon of the second day we heard that Gorringe had taken Abu Roman, and had wired that all was well—"advance continues." But two more days of sickening uncertainty followed, and the General let us know that he thought it best to reduce the Indian ration to 7 oz. of meal until he got good news! The news was not long in coming, but it was not good; for on the 10th Townshend issued another *communiqué*, and our suspense at least was ended. Here it is:—

"The result of the attack of the Relief

Force on the Turks entrenched in the Sanaaiyat position is that the Relief Force has not yet won its way through, but is entrenched close up to the Turks; in places, some 200 to 300 yards distant. General Gorringe wired me last night he was consolidating his position as close to the enemy's trenches as he can get, with the intention of attacking again. He had had some difficulty with the floods, which he had remedied. I have no other details.

“However, you will see that I must not run any risk over the date calculated to which our rations would last, namely, 15th April, as you all understand well that digging means delay, though General Gorringe does not say so. I am compelled, therefore, to appeal to you all to make a determined effort to eke out our scanty means, so that I can hold out for certain

till our comrades arrive, and I know I shall not appeal to you in vain. I have then to reduce your rations to 5 ounces of meal for all ranks, British and Indian.

“In this way I can hold out till the 21st of April if it become necessary. I do not think it will become necessary, but it is my duty to take all the precautions in my power. I am very sorry I can no longer favour the Indian soldiers in the matter of meal, but there is no possibility of doing so now. It must be remembered that there is plenty of horse-flesh, which they have been authorised by their religious leaders to eat, and I have to recall with sorrow that by not having taken advantage of this wise and just dispensation, they have weakened my power of resistance. . . .

“In my *communiqué* to you of 26th January I told you that our duty stood

out plain and simple : it was to stand here and hold up the Turkish advance on the Tigris, working heart and soul together, and I expressed the hope that we would make this defence to be remembered in history as a glorious one, and I asked you in this connection to remember the defence of Plevna, which was longer even than that of Ladysmith. Well, you have nobly carried out your mission ; you have nobly answered the trust and appeal I put to you. The whole British Empire, let me tell you, is ringing now with our defence of Kut. You will all be proud to say one day, 'I was one of the garrison at Kut.' And as for Plevna and Ladysmith, we have outlasted them also. Whatever happens now we have all done our duty. As I said in my report of the defence of this place, which has now been telegraphed to Headquarters, it was not possible in despatches

to mention every one, but I could safely say that every individual in this Force has done his duty to his King and country. I was absolutely calm and confident, as I told you on the 26th January, of the ultimate result, and I am confident now. I ask you all, comrades of all ranks, British and Indian, to help me now in this food question, as I ask you above."

The next day we were given another *communiqué*—a short one. "The army commander," it said, "wired to me yesterday evening to say 'there can be no doubt that Gorringe can in time force his way through to Kut; in consequence of yesterday's failure, however, it is certainly doubtful if he can reach you by April 15.' . . ." So we tightened our belts again with a grin, and sat down to go on with it, for the idea of giving in to the Turk was unthinkable.

## XIV.

## THE FALL OF KUT.

THE last phase! It couldn't be a long one, we knew, but we still had great faith in our comrades down below, and had no thought of giving in before every ounce of our stuff had been consumed.

The idea of having to open our gates to the enemy made one furious, and one resolutely put aside the possibility of becoming prisoner for yet another week or more. Nobody grumbled, save at unkind Fate, and large numbers of the Indians at last took to eating the meat. Poor devils! they were desperately hungry

and were glad of anything they could get. Though we jested and joked and made light of each other's vanishing figure, yet it was a time of misery—a long-drawn-out agony of suspense and disappointment, and of not a little suffering. There was no lack of incident: the slaughter down below, the herculean efforts our people were making to relieve us, and their attempts to feed us; the effects of starvation on the garrison, the unrest amongst the Arabs—all combined to make it a time to be remembered and deplored. . . .

General Hoghton lay dying. He could not eat the horse-meat and became a shadow of his former robust self. He was one of the first victims of an acute intestinal trouble that was fatal to so many in those last three weeks. He died on the 13th and was buried the

same day. All who could do so attended his funeral to bid farewell to a good man and to mourn his loss. A military funeral is always impressive, but under those conditions it was doubly so. Silent and sorrowful we stood around and listened to the well-known service recited in the padre's solemn tones. They ceased—a brief pause, and then the bugles took up the refrain, and clear and mournful rang out those wonderful notes of the "Last Post." Were they prophetic, we wondered, of the fate of Kut? . . .

The weather grew cold again ; the wind blew from the north-east and brought with it a perfect hurricane and yet more rain, but the R.F. stuck to it in a wonderful way, and we constantly heard their guns at work and saw their flashes at night, though the 15th came and they

seemed no nearer. They wired to say they were going to feed us by aeroplane and to drop us 5000 lb. a day. It was about time; we were down to 4 oz. of bread now: coarse, damp stuff, made of half-ground barley-meal with a plentiful flavouring of sand; and we had issued to us the last two days' emergency rations, which were to be kept until further orders. It was said that our people down below wired up suggesting that we should search the town for food! It was a brilliant idea, but was a few weeks behind the times. On the 16th April they made several trips and dropped us a good many sacks—two at a time. We felt as Elijah must have done when he had to depend on the ravens. But it takes a lot of aeroplanes to feed 15,000 to 20,000 people. Had they started a

month before it would have made some appreciable difference. As it was, it only enabled us to hang on for another couple of days or so. Watching food dropping became a popular amusement, especially amongst our Indian patients. A plane would be heard approaching ; spectators would rush out and stand gaping, laughing, and chattering about it like children. “ Dekko ! Dekko ! abhi girega ! Nahin, Nahin ! itna nazdik nahin hai. Abhi dekko ! Aah ! giradya ” (he’s made it fall”). A wee speck could be seen leaving the “bus” ; over and over it turned, larger and larger—generally two of them —faster and faster, till it whizzed down behind a house, and one imagined the “wump!” with which it landed. They always put one sack inside another and larger one, so that when the inside one

burst the outer one prevented the scattering of the precious flour. Now and then they dropped a load into the river or into the Turkish lines, where they were doubtless thankful for some extra rations. It generally seemed to be the sailor-men who did this. Perhaps with the larger vision one acquires at sea, it was difficult to see so small a bit of land as Kut. These “boss shots” gave occasion, at any rate—so it was said—for the sending of facetious messages over the wireless to them down below: “Would H.M. Navy mind dropping *us* something now and then instead of to the Turks?” “Was the R.F. quite sure it was on the right river?” and so forth. On the 17th we heard a great battle going on. Machine-gun and rifle fire was distinctly audible and we were mightily cheered. It was

the fighting at Beit Aiessa, only six or seven miles away! In the middle of it all our men in the trenches started cheering, with the result that there was a wild stampede of Arabs “down our street.” They thought the Turks were coming, but there was nothing to be seen, and goodness only knows what it was all about, unless our men thought they saw a body of Turks retreating. Our hopes that such was the case were soon dissipated, for they started shelling us again, so they were evidently not upset very much.

That same night there was more furious fighting over against Beit Aiessa, where the Turks were counter-attacking and losing so heavily. We heard afterwards that our people counted 1500 dead next morning.

In the morning of the 19th there was

more heavy cannonading, but we didn't learn the result. The 20th came, and the Army Commander sent in a message, saying : "Stick to it, Gorringe will relieve you in a few days." We stuck to it. The next day we heard that the Turks had lost very heavily and that the R.F. were consolidating their position ! But our rations were almost at an end ; the emergency ration had to be used on the morrow. We began to grow despondent. We were hungry and thin, and getting weaker. The steps up to the roof seemed to get larger, and one was often "blown" on reaching the top. Sapper Tomlin came in and said they were bored to tears. "There's nothing to do," he grumbled ; "the men are too weak to work, so we're out of a job."

We ourselves had plenty to do, but the work was heart-breaking. The small stock

of rice that had been set apart for the hospitals, with which we had been feeding those who couldn't eat solid food, was used up, and the milk was reduced to a bottle or two. Some of the patients were woefully thin ; and when an Indian gets thin he is an appalling object. Many died, chiefly from intestinal troubles ; but we were helpless ; it is useless to oil or stimulate a machine if you can't give it coal for its engines !

It made us long for the end—any end almost, for the sake of the miserable sick. In any event another week would settle it.

We talked of “menus” often, in the manner peculiar to starving people, and of what we would first have to eat when we were free again ; where we would go for leave, and how luxuriously lazy we would be for the first few days. Our

bread came to us in 8-oz. loaves for two people. So fearful were we of not getting our full half that it became an invariable rule that one cut the loaf and the other chose his half. This method ensures the maximum amount of care and accuracy on the part of the cutter.

On the night of the 21st a party of Arabs deserted the town and got away across the river. The rats were beginning to leave the sinking ship! The Turks let us know that they would not receive any more, but would shoot them if they tried it. But, although the Arabs were told that if they left the town they wouldn't be allowed in again, they persisted in their attempts. The next day a large group of them was very busy for hours in the open street making a large raft out of wooden settees and inflated skins

wherewith to cross the stream. But they didn't succeed, for the Turks were as good as their word, with the result that there were several in hospital next morning.

On the 22nd there was a heavy cannonade in the morning, and we could see the bursts of H.E. over a long line of a mile or more; but the result was another disappointment, for the next day we got a *communiqué* to say that the R.F. had not taken Sanaaiyat, but had advanced a little on the right bank. As a set-off the aeroplanes made fourteen or fifteen trips and dropped food.

It was Easter Sunday, and Trixie and I went to church in the morning. The two little rooms, still intact, were crowded with officers. Why had so many come that day? Was it to share in the joyous festival of Easter, of the resurrection of

the God-man, or was it the growing fear in our hearts that the service would be the last of its kind in Kut, and that the future was so full of uncertainty ?

Be that as it may, there was a very good attendance, and after the morning service the Communion was held. One by one, in a silence that could be felt, the gaunt and war-worn defenders, with the thoughtful eyes of those who had seen much, went up each in his turn and knelt before the padre. A deep hush fell over us all, and in those few moments men got near to their God. . . .

On the 24th a quiver of excitement went through us when we got wind of the impending attempt of the R.F. to run the blockade that night by a boat full of food. We could hardly sleep for thinking about it, and were up on the H.Q.

roof as the sun rose. There she was, the gallant *Fulnar*, over against Megasis Fort, stuck in the mud just within range of our longest guns, with her splendid captain on her bridge lying dead in a pool of his own blood. So pleased were the Turks—so one of their officers who was there told me afterwards—with the gallant bravery of poor Cowley and the other man with him on the *Fulnar*, that they, then and there, gave them a special military funeral in recognition of their magnificent effort, which so nearly succeeded. But the enemy had her, and her capture sealed our fate. Deep down within us we knew we were now done for, that our people couldn't get through, and that for us it meant Baghdad, or Mosul, or God only knew where! We did not acknowledge it yet, however, and that day another

auction was held, at which prices ruled higher than ever: a box of cheroots fetched 206 rupees, and a tin of fifty Wills' cigarettes were sold for over £3—surely the biggest money ever paid for “Three Castles”!

That night, after leaving us almost alone for a day or two, the Turks gave us a bad “strafeing,” and followed it up by an evening hate next day and another night bombardment, much to the discomfort of a Turkish envoy who stayed the night in the town. They also accounted for at least one of the aeroplanes of the R.F. that had been working very hard at our food supply, but now got interfered with by the Fokkers, that had the wings of them.

On the 23rd and 24th we had eaten our first day's emergency ration split into two; on the 25th and 26th we fed on the aero-

plane supply, and on the 27th we broached half of our last day's reserve ration.

On the 26th we heard that negotiations were in progress, that all was about to be over, and the next morning the General went to interview the Turk. It was unthinkable that the old flag would have to come down, and we were heartbroken about it. After the many disappointments and the awful suspense we had passed through, the final blow seemed almost too much. One had thought during those last few days that almost any ending would be preferable to the intolerable uncertainty, that any settlement would be a relief to the mental tension, but it was not so; when the end came the disappointment was too great,—it overshadowed everything else.

The town was quiet, the guns and the sniping ceased; the silence was uncanny! The Arabs came out of their houses in

large numbers and hung about, talking in groups. There was no disturbance: guards of British Tommies had been placed at different points to prevent it. We wandered about listlessly, or sat in our courtyard and guessed at the terms we should get.

Would they take us all prisoners, or would they let us go on parole? Would the Geneva Convention hold, and the doctors go down with the sick, or would they be exchanged? These and a hundred other questions remained unanswered whilst the hours dragged slowly by. I met the General with his Staff returning from the interview. He looked fairly well and carried his head high. He had done all that man could do and had no cause to be ashamed—but what a disappointment after five months of gallant resistance! General Melliss, too, felt it most acutely: he had been ill for some days, and I shall not

easily forget the signs of suffering I read on his weather-beaten face; the surrender seared his very soul.

The next day, the 28th, we destroyed things. Guns were blown up, and bits of them were flying about in a most dangerous way; rifles were smashed up, waggons were burnt; ammunition was dumped into the river at night; field-glasses, swords, and pistols were broken and thrown away. Some day in the future, when those Arabs dig up their cess-pits or clean out their wells, they'll find many a bit of rusty old iron of suggestive shape; maybe their drinking-water will develop tonic properties and improve the village health—who knows?

Finally, Townshend issued his last characteristically optimistic *communiqué*, and prepared us for the morrow's surrender. It was all over; the unbelievable had hap-

pened : Kut had fallen ! Thus Townshend, on the 28th :—

“ It became clear, after General Gorringe’s second repulse on 22nd April at Sanaaiyat, of which I was informed by the Army Commander by wire, that the Relief Force could not win its way through in anything like time to relieve us, our limit of resistance as regards food being the 29th April. . . .

“ I was then ordered to open negotiations for the surrender of Kut ; in the words of the Army Commander’s telegram, ‘the onus not lying on yourself. You are in a position of having conducted a gallant and successful defence, and you will be in a position to get better terms than any emissary of ours. . . . The Admiral, who has been in consultation with the Army Commander, considers that

you, with your prestige, are likely to get the best terms; we can, of course, supply food as you may arrange.'

"These considerations alone, namely, that I can help my comrades of all ranks to the end, have decided me to overcome my bodily illness and the anguish of mind which I am suffering now, and I have interviewed the Turkish General-in-Chief yesterday, who is full of admiration at 'an heroic defence of five months,' as he puts it.

"Negotiations are still in progress, but I hope to be able to announce your departure for India, on parole not to serve against the Turks, since the Turkish Commander says he thinks it will be allowed, and has wired to Constantinople to ask for this, and that the *Fulnar*, which is lying with food for us at Megasis, now may be permitted

to come to us. Whatever has happened, my comrades, you can only be proud of yourselves. We have done our duty to King and Empire; the whole world knows we have done our duty.

“I ask you to stand by me with your ready and splendid discipline, shown throughout, in the next few days for the expedition of all service I demand of you. We may possibly go into camp, I hope, between the Fort and town along the shore, whence we can easily embark.

“The following message has been received from the Army Commander: ‘The C.-in-C. has desired me to convey to you and your brave and devoted troops his appreciation of the manner in which you together have undergone the suffering and hardships of the siege, which he knows has been due to the high spirit of devotion to

duty in which you have met the call of your Sovereign and Empire. The C.-in-C.'s sentiments are shared by myself, General Gorringe, and all the troops of the Tigris Column. We can only express extreme disappointment, and regret our effort to relieve you should not have been crowned with success.' ”

*Copy of a Telegram from Captain  
Nunn, C.M.G., R.N.*

“We, the officers and men of the Royal Navy who have been associated with the Tigris Corps, and many of us so often worked with you and your gallant troops, desire to express our heartfelt regret at our inability to join hands with you and your comrades in Kut.”

And so, with a farewell from our friends below, we went into captivity.

## XV

## IN KUT AFTER THE SURRENDER.

THE 29th of April 1916—the surrender was an accomplished fact. Going to hospital early that morning, I saw nothing of the “taking over” or of the Division marching out, but I walked on to the river bank for a few minutes, where there were signs of the new state of things. A motor-launch flying a white flag was scudding across to Woolpress; a Turkish barge was working its way down by the bank, and the few Turks aboard her were throwing service biscuits to the very few Arab

gamins and loafers whose curiosity had brought them forth. For five solid months that bank had been a no man's land, and it was strange now to be walking about it without being shot at,—one felt naked and unsafe. I couldn't trust myself to go towards the Serai to see what had happened to the "flag," and I never knew when it came down—imagining it was more than enough. My first intimation of the change of ownership of the town was when, returning to my quarters, I found Turkish soldiers patrolling the streets. They had just come in, and I was astonished to find things quiet and orderly. On the threshold of the Mess I was met by an excited servant. "Master, come quickly, there are enemy soldiers in your room stealing your things!" I ran up to an upper room, where the day before I had been looking

through my kit, and found there three ragged, bronzed, and hefty Turks disporting themselves amongst my wardrobe, and bashing open my boxes with the butt-end of their muskets. I proceeded to expostulate in every language I knew other than English, but they merely stared. Doing so they noticed my revolver, which I was unfortunately still wearing. One fellow promptly seized it and pulled. My protests only irritated him, and he pulled and wrenched the more, whilst his nearest comrade closed up with an ugly-looking bayonet, so I came to the conclusion that the Geneva Convention was just then a broken reed and withdrew my objections, and went outside to see if I could find some one in authority. This I did by chance at the gate, and explained the matter with some heat to a Turkish officer

who was passing by. He said that all arms had to be given up, doctors' and all, but took my name and the pistol, and promised to have it returned to me if it could be allowed. Of course, I heard no more about it. However, he moved on my "looters," and we proceeded to put what remained to us in as safe a place as possible ; but more things disappeared. All day long and at night the Turks wandered in to see what they could pick up. They were not offensive in any way, but just walked in and turned over anything they came across, and if they fancied it, took it. As we had to stay behind alone amongst the new masters of Kut, this sort of thing became a nuisance ; but after two or three efforts, we got them to put a sentry at the door of the "Hakims'" dwelling, and we had no more trouble.

Returning to hospital, I found very con-

siderable looting going on. The Osmanlis were sauntering through the Bazar looting blankets, boots, puttees, and anything else of a useful nature, from the miserable patients. Looking at them, one didn't wonder. Their uniforms were ragged and patched in all directions, their boots were worn beyond hope of repair, and they were generally most disreputable-looking specimens of a modern army. But they were good-natured-looking fellows—broad, strong as oxen, with plenty of bone, ruddy complexions, and in many cases blue eyes and ginger whiskers. They looked what they were, I suppose, just easy-going, illiterate Anatolian peasantry ; but get them really annoyed, and they are very rough customers, and would, I should say, stick at nothing.

After a good deal of trouble and of worrying a *jeune* Turk who was in charge

of our “quarter,” we got them to place sentries at most of the openings into the Hospitals, and matters improved considerably. The difficulty thereafter was to prevent our men fraternising with the enemy and selling to him for any sort of pittance such things as they still possessed.

The next thing was a meeting of the respective medical chiefs of the two forces to decide upon rations and the treatment of the sick and wounded. I had the good fortune to be present at this interesting conference. We were taken on board a big river steamer of theirs which had just come down from Shamran, one of those we had so often espied from the roof. With great show of politeness our chief and the rest of us were led on to the upper deck and introduced to the Médecin-en-Chef and his entourage. Coffee was

brought and cigarettes were handed round. Then they got to business. "Strengths" were noted, questions asked regarding numbers of sick and kinds of diseases, and arrangements were made for Turkish medical officers to visit our hospitals, and, together with our own officers, to examine and pick out all the most seriously sick and wounded. These it had been arranged were to be sent down the river in exchange for Turkish prisoners.

Before leaving, we chatted with the Turks for a few minutes: they deplored the war and the suffering it entailed, and spoke of the humanitarian nature of our profession which enabled us to meet on common ground. They referred to the gallant effort of the *Fulnar* to get through to us, and expressed the greatest admiration for the officers and crew who manned her.

By this time the aspect of Kut had changed—the town appeared to be *en fête*. Every other Arab house flaunted a red or red-and-white flag, even as some months before they had put up their white one for us to show their respect and friendliness for the conqueror. The streets were thronged with Arabs and Turks, apart from those on duty, wandering about inspecting the village and doubtless noting the ruin their shells had caused. Mounted patrols of Arab cavalry, looking as though cut out of a picture story, covered with pistols and extraordinary trappings, rode through from time to time and added to the picturesqueness of the scene and to the disorganisation of hospital life. The sight of these cut-throats seemed to rub in the indignity of being a prisoner, and one cursed one's fate.

The next morning the promised rations did not turn up ; it was not until late in the afternoon that we got hold of them and were able to feed our famishing patients. After that we got them regularly. During the day the *Firefly* came down and moored alongside the bank. Painted up by the Turks and as clean as a new pin, she looked very smart and English, though she no longer flew the white ensign. The Turkish sailors looked very natty in their white duck trimmed with red and blue, and they moved about nimbly enough.

As I stood there looking on, all eyes turned shoreward, and following their gaze I saw the Turkish Generalissimo approaching with his Staff, and with him General Delamain and two or three Staff Officers. With set face and self-conscious mien

Khalil Pasha walked aboard followed by Delamain, and up the little companion to the bridge deck, where they seated themselves in chairs placed for the purpose. He gave a short, curt order, and the sailors immediately cast off and headed up-stream. So, with honour, a British General passed into captivity, but it was not good to see him go. Khalil Pasha is young and handsome, well made, of average height—an open face with fresh complexion and deep-set brown eyes, and a well-chiselled chin—he did not look more than thirty-three years of age, and his movements were quick and purposeful.

The next few days we were busy showing our cases to the Turkish M.O.'s, explaining briefly their trouble and condition, whereupon the Turk would examine them and decide their fate. It was pathetic to

watch the anxiety of some of the lads, as they watched the deliberations and awaited the verdict that should decide their fate.

The work was strenuous, for the weather was hot, and we were glad to get out on the river bank in the evenings. Kut from the river presented a sorry sight; the Serai was half down, the S. and T. go-down beyond it a wreck. The old coffee-shop was a ruined mass of brick, and the lower Bazar and the rest of the Front showed numerous holes. Within a couple of days the Turks were pulling down what was left of the portion nearest the river. Further signs of the Turkish occupation, of a more gruesome character, were also very soon in evidence. Three rough wooden tripods about eight feet high were erected on the most open portion of the bank, and on these they hanged various

delinquents whom they suspected of helping their enemies. The wretched Sassoon, who had been of such great assistance to our S. and T. Corps, was one of these. Just before the fall of Kut he had gone into hiding, but his hiding-place was betrayed to the Turks, who chased him from it and finally caught him on a roof. Here they beat him unmercifully, and then took him out and hanged him. Their method is a simple one—they just string them up and let them dangle with their toes an inch or two above the ground. Several batches of other poor wretches were also shot with their backs to the wall. I came across five in a row one morning, lying in all sorts of positions, and saw another batch of a dozen being led off to a place of execution. They had gambled and lost!

On the 1st of May a river hospital ship came up from the R.F. with a medical

staff on board. The presence of the staff dashed our own hopes of taking the sick down, but otherwise we were more than pleased to see them, and to shout a message or two for them to send home. They brought up with them a barge full of food stores, which were taken up to Shamran, a few miles up the river, where our troops were encamped, the barge returning in the evening. We in Kut had been left out of the calculation and got nothing, but Trixie and I managed to get as much as we could carry from our friends on the boat. We were strolling along having a look at the hospital ship, from approaching which we were debarred by sentries, when a medico on the barge hailed us with the words, "Could you do with some jam? do you want any baccy?" *Could we do with some jam?*—they didn't seem to realise that

we'd had none of either for weeks! Anyhow, a good-natured sentry saw what was toward, and allowed us to get near enough to catch the precious tins, and even to take a half-filled case of "bubbly." He summoned also an orderly to help us carry the swag, so we sent him a present of a bottle and all was well. We were popular members of the Mess that night—and how good that champagne was!

Our little Mess had swollen to double its size, for the Colonel and B. M. and Hepaton had joined the chummery for company's sake, and Booth of the R.E. also became an Honorary Member. He was staying behind with a burying party to perform a necessary though gruesome task, and he made himself very useful as a foraging officer. To the tinned milk, jam, and champagne he added a leg of mutton, so "all merrie."

In the afternoons, on two or three occasions, Turkish officers paid us visits of ceremony. We took tea and smoked cigarettes together. One of them, an Arab, had escaped from Amara after our occupation of that town, and laughed with great enjoyment as he recounted his method of fooling, in the disguise of a native, the Political Officer of the moment. Another was one Haider Ali, who, brought up in America, seemed to like to "buk" with us in English. He was, of course, much in demand as an envoy between the two armies and as an interpreter. He also censored the few letters that came through from below, and also took some of ours and promised to have them sent down the river to our people.

Emin Bey, the Commandant—a thoughtful, capable-looking man of forty or thereabouts—was courteous and reasonable

enough in his treatment of us. From time to time, if he thought we wanted too much, he would tell us a long story of his unfortunate experiences amongst the Russians; how that, on the outbreak of war, he was with a military mission in the Caucasus, and a guest of the Czar, but thereafter was treated with very scant ceremony and put to much inconvenience before he got home again. “I,” he would say, “treat you much better than that, and you are prisoners of war!”

The sifting of the sick and wounded went on steadily, and kept us busy getting them ready to embark. Each evening the hospital ship went down with a load; each morning she returned for another. Every man, before he was allowed on board, was searched; and everything of value save his money, if he had any, was taken away from him. None of us was allowed to speak

to the British doctors on the ship, nor to board her. It was a galling thing to be standing on shore within a yard or two of one's friends of the R.F., and not to be able to talk to them; for there were a thousand things we were dying to ask and to learn from them. Abdul Kadir, the Turkish medical factotum, however, assured us that the M.O.'s still left in Kut—fourteen of us—would be exchanged and go down with the last boat-load. The negotiations, he said, were not quite complete; but it would be all right; and we believed him. We exulted in our luck, stifled our qualms, and counted the hours to our release.

One day we were informed that all our kit of any military value, which we as medicals had been allowed to keep and which we expected to take down with us, was to be given up “in exchange for

a receipt by the Turkish Government." Tents, saddlery, pistols, field-glasses, surgical instruments, and our swords were piled together and handed over, but we got no receipt. How we wished we had smashed everything up, especially our swords! But it was too late, and they wolfed the lot. However, our eyes were on the "last boat," and on the evening of about the eighth day we were told to be ready to embark the next morning, and to have our kits ready on the bank by nine.

Needless to say we were there in time, sitting on our boxes, eager to catch sight of the boat as she came round the bend. But an hour passed and no boat appeared.

The factotum got anxious, and said he would send us down on a barge, and proceeded to get one. Another hour passed, but just as our spirits had sunk about down

to our boots the hospital ship appeared. No yacht ever looked so fair or liner so desirable; on she came, and our spirits rose to par again. She came in to the shore and tied up, and we prepared to go aboard, but, alas! we had not done with disappointment. Some one handed a note to Abdul Kadir, who turned to us with a white face. “Our General at the front line has not received an answer about you from the British Headquarters. I am very sorry, but you will not be able to be exchanged at present, but will have to go to Baghdad!” This was really a bolt from the blue, and it left us stunned. Life held no further bitterness for us; we had touched bed-rock of disappointment. Wearily we gathered our men together, once more shouldered our baggage, and, disconsolate, returned to our lodging.

## XVI.

VOYAGE TO BAGHDAD, MAY 1916.

ON May 9th we sailed for Baghdad on a finely-built river steamer called the *Khalifa*. Whilst I was strolling about waiting to embark, a good-looking German sailor accosted me in very good English. He belonged to the *Goeben*, and was, he informed me, a petty officer, and in civil life an electrician in Hamburg.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “to see your fellows going away into captivity. I don’t suppose ten per cent of them will ever see their homes again.” I asked him what he meant, and he answered with a shrug

of his shoulders that they would have a bad time. “Our Germans who go to England as prisoners will, we know, be well cared for and will get back again, and so will your English who go to Germany, but those who go to the Turks —no, perhaps not so many as ten in a hundred will ever get back !”

This was not in any way cheering, but I thought he was exaggerating. Still, I wondered how much truth there was in his remarks ; he had travelled down from Gallipoli, and knew what the route was like and the Turkish manner of doing it. Many a time since I have thought of what he said, apparently in all sincerity, and I fear for the truth of his prophecy !

Only four or five of us, including pessimistic Horace and Lancelot, with certain of our hospital personnel, travelled by the *Khalifa* ; the rest of the disappointed

fourteen, with their men and all the sick and wounded who remained unexchanged in Kut, were put on board another ship. I believe it was the old *Fulnar*, the upper deck of which was devoid of awning. This was a serious matter for them, for the sun was now fiercely hot after 10 A.M. So we of the *Khalifa* scored heavily, for we had no sick on board, and took only four days to reach Baghdad, whereas the others on the *Fulnar* had a bad time, and took ten.

Moreover, our ship's doctor, Hassan Bey, made himself agreeable; and presently, as we were sitting about on our kit on the lower deck, the Commandant, Emin, came along and inquired if accommodation had been provided for us. On our replying in the negative, he said he would clear the upper deck at once and make room. Within an hour or two

this was done. A round dozen or so of German officers were removed to one end inside a railing, and the rest of the large roomy deck cleared of Arabs and other impedimenta.

Soon we were invited to come up and doss down where we liked. As we were doing so one of the Germans came across and politely suggested that we had chosen a bad place, and that we should be more comfortable on the other side, since we were likely to be crowded out by Arabs where we were. We thanked him and moved, and were glad later on that we had done so. We spoke a few words with the Germans from time to time, though our relations were always marked by more reserve than cordiality, whereas with the Turks we were friendly enough. One of the Germans had been a business

man in Baghdad for the past two or three years, and spoke appreciatively of the many Englishmen he had known and mixed with there during that time.

The Turkish Commandant and his Staff came on board, and took up their quarters well forward on the same deck, and we then cast off and said good-bye to Kut. We hoped we should soon see it again on a return journey, for we had been given to understand that we should be exchanged before long.

At Shamran we stopped to take on board practically all the officers of the old VIth Division, or those that were left of them, and every square yard of deck was soon occupied.

There had been a big camp here, but the men had been marched on, save the sick, and those whom even the Turks

considered unfit for the journey. They had revised the "unfit" list of our M.O.'s, and reduced them to a minimum, with the result that they had to carry hundreds up by boat from the first stage at Baghela. Going ashore at Shamran I came across the Colonel, and "Mac" and Canning, and one or two more who were in charge of the sick there. They said a good many of our fellows had died, but that things were now improving. Living in the open, with plenty of food, had done wonders for them, and they were looking nearly well again. We got a few of their surplus stores, and resumed our voyage. The journey to Baghdad was got through without incident, and comfortably enough, save that we were packed like sardines. Each morning and evening, however, the C.O. agreed to tie up at the bank for half an

hour or so, to give us an opportunity of stretching our legs, and of washing and bathing, which was a great boon. The country was as flat as ever, mostly desert, and desperately uninteresting. Here and there we passed an Arab village, the denizens of which would come out and gape at us, and cheer and extol the Turks with their haul of prisoners. Linked arm-in-arm, all the males of the place would run or dance in line, keeping pace with the ship, yelling or chanting a song of triumph, and blazing off any old muskets or pistols they happened to possess. But the Turks only smiled, called them “*cancaille*,” and shrugged their shoulders.

At Baghela we passed the other boat with the sick on board. She was tying up there to take on several hundreds of sick men of ours who had fallen out on

the march up from Kut. We heard afterwards that she couldn't take them all, but she filled herself up to her utmost capacity, and we thanked our stars that we were not travelling in her, for the discomfort on board her was extreme, and several deaths occurred. There were so many delays, due to sand-banks and lack of fuel, that the food gave out, and altogether they all passed through a horrible ten days. About half-way to Baghdad we passed Azizieh, on the left bank, and those who had spent many hot weeks in that miserable mud village the October before shuddered at the remembrance of them.

The third day we passed Laj, and soon afterwards came in sight of the wonderful old arch of Ctesiphon, and the scene of the battle of six months before. We could see the famous arch for miles before we

got there ; it looked like a big brown haystack or an airship-shed in the distance, but assumed noble proportions as we neared it. Ctesiphon, as every one knows, was a great and magnificent city at one time under the Parthian kings, who made it their winter residence.

Under the early Sassanian monarchs it was a place of great importance, but of course it was plundered by the Arabs in the seventh century. It arose after the decay of Seleucia, the great Greek capital, which was situated opposite it on the right bank.

The Arch—which comprises the façade and the huge vaulted hall of a palace—is an enormous thing, and gives one some idea of what must have been the glory of the city that could produce it. It measures, they say, over 120 feet high, 160 odd wide,

and 180 long. Apart from this wonderful arch, there is little to suggest that here once flourished a great city—nothing but a few low mounds and a long wall (the “high wall” of the battle of Ctesiphon), and the tomb near by of Suleiman Pâk. What remains looks horribly lonely and desolate —“dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”; how literally true that seems in this country!

Soon after leaving Ctesiphon we passed the mouth of the Diala river, which joins the Tigris eight or nine miles from Bagdad, and on the banks of which the Turks had prepared a position to retire on after Ctesiphon, but never needed it. Beyond this the banks were lined with date-groves and gardens—we were approaching the magic city.

Presently we came to isolated river-side

houses, and then more, until finally they were almost continuous—now a row of mean dwellings, now a more pretentious mansion.

At last a vista of good-looking villas, with upper stories overhanging the river, nestling in their gardens of palms, orange, vine, and fig trees, lining both banks, with the broad smooth river between, opened out before us; minarets and domes we could see reflecting the morning sunshine. The prospect was a pleasing one, and, under the circumstances of our arrival, one to be remembered. Very many of the larger houses flew the red crescent flag, and on their balconies were groups of sick soldiers, dressed in their loose red or blue cotton gowns, with small caps of the same material—Baghdad seemed to be mostly hospital. At last, just as we came in sight of the bridge

of boats, we slowed down opposite the largest and most imposing building we had yet seen, and which we recognised as the British Consulate, and there we stopped and prepared to disembark.

The glory of Baghdad has departed, but some of its wonderful reputation still lives on amongst us, and its history is a great one.

Essentially an Arab city, it was founded on an uninhabited site—so, at least, say the Arab writers—in 762 A.D. (145 H.) by the second of the Abbaside Caliphs, El Mansur, as the capital of the Empire of the Arabs.

But although the site was bare at that time, remains of a former habitation have been discovered, notably those by Rawlinson, who found the remains of a river-side

wall built of bricks stamped with the name and superscription of Nebuchadnezzar. All around it lay evidences of the existence of great cities of the past. Thirty miles to the south-west are the mounds of that great city, Babylon; twenty to the east, the great arch of Parthian Ctesiphon stands sentinel over the surrounding waste, and hard by had flourished Seleucia of the Greeks, whilst farther away to the north proud Nineveh once held sway.

In the eighth century the country was still prosperous, and watered by the extensive system of irrigation channels which once turned the fertile plain into a land flowing with milk and honey, so that the site of the new city was doubtless well chosen, both by reason of the wealth of the country and because of its situation amongst the supporters of the Caliphate.

Commencing as a comparatively small city on the right bank of the river, it was built around the Caliph's palace as a centre, and enclosed by three circular brick walls and a ditch. It was so arranged that the palace was separated from the innermost wall by a large open space, whilst the houses of the inhabitants were all erected between the inner and middle walls, a road separating the latter from the outermost rampart.

The city rapidly spread in extent and in population until, by the end of the eighth century, it covered some twenty-five square miles.

Enriched and adorned by Sultan Harun el Raschid, it gathered to itself all the wealth, art, and learning of the East. Its colleges became famous the world over; its bazars attracted merchants from the

four corners of the earth, from China to Spain. Its mosques reared their lofty domes and graceful minarets in all quarters of the city, and resounded with the vigorous polemics of religious contestants.

Its palaces were bathed in luxury and splendour, and its enormous revenue was spent with a royal prodigality.

Its merchants sailed far and wide in their quest of rare and costly goods, and the adventures of one of them, old Sindbad, have fascinated us all.

Medicine and mathematics, astronomy, alchemy, and algebra were all pursued with enthusiastic zeal, and we owe much to the labours of Avicenna, the great physician, and his contemporaries.

Baghdad, in a word, became the foremost and most renowned city in the world, and it remained the seat of the imperial

power of the Arabs for close on 500 years.

But the seeds of decay were early sown in this Abbasid Caliphate which once held sway from India to the Atlantic, and Baghdad felt and shared in the various vicissitudes through which it passed. Early in the ninth century civil war broke out between the followers of rival viziers, and the city experienced its first siege and capture in 813 A.D. Disintegration of the Empire began to take place—North Africa was lost to it early in the same century, and the Emirate of Cordova, already independent, proclaimed itself a rival Caliphate a hundred years later. Syria and Egypt soon declared their independence, and Northern Mesopotamia fell under the dominion of the Arab Hamdanids.

In Baghdad itself the Creed, that great

binding force which kept together the differing racial elements of the Empire, began to lose its cohesive power through heresy and schism, and heterodox doctrines of all sorts were taught and discussed in the schools and the mosques. The weakening of the Faith was inevitably followed by a steady increase in the vices and degeneracy of the Caliphate, though the city still flourished and remained for long the great emporium of the commerce of the East. By the end of the tenth century the vast empire of the Caliphs, weakened by internal dissensions, had become little better than a collection of scattered dynasties that paid but scant respect to the Caliph, and it was about this time that a very numerous tribe of Turkish nomads from Central Asia, led by Seljûk, appeared in Bokhara. Early in the next century

they crossed the Oxus and defeated and displaced the Ghaznavids, from whom they absorbed the tenets of orthodox Mohammedanism. Adopting the Faith with fervour, they brought new life to the dying Caliphate. Under Toghril, they overran Persia, Mesopotamia, and Syria, and made successful war on the Emperor of Byzantium, and in 1055 A.D. Toghril came to Baghdad to pay homage to the Caliph, el Kaim, as successor of the Prophet, who invested him with the title of "representative of the Caliph and protector of the Moslems."

Toghril Bey was succeeded by his nephew Alp-arslan, who overran Asia Minor and defeated the Byzantine emperor Diogenes Romanus, whilst under his successor, Melik Shah, the Turks extended their dominion to Egypt.

Under their protection the Caliphate of Baghdad obtained a new lease of life, but a century later, in 1180, an attempt was made to secure its independence of the Turks by the aid of the Shah of Kharezm. This was followed later by the deposition of Caliph el Nasir, at the hands of the Shah, against whom he had intrigued.

The Caliph appealed for assistance to Chingiz Khan, the terrible Mongol, who defeated the Shah in 1219 and then proceeded to overrun Armenia, Georgia, and Mesopotamia.

Chingiz Khan was succeeded by his son Ogotay, who continued the congenial work of devastation and pillage. The Caucasus, Southern Russia, Hungary, and Poland were overrun, as well as Anatolia, where the Seljûk Sultan of Rûm was defeated about the year 1240. It was Hulagu, the

brother of the next Mongol ruler, who was sent to destroy Baghdad, and to this end he besieged the city in 1258, took it, and put to death the Caliph, Mustasim Billah. The city was sacked and given over to pillage for many weeks, for it was a city worth looting. A million of its inhabitants were put to death, and all its priceless works of art and its manuscripts were destroyed, so that “Moslem civilisation has never recovered from the deadly blow.”

Hulagu ruined the whole system of irrigation canals which made Mesopotamia perhaps the richest country in the world, and thus “destroyed the work of 300 generations.”

The Mongols ravaged, plundered, and killed wherever they went, but, curiously enough, treated Christians not unkindly,

and Hulagu and others married Christian women.

Deprived of the Caliphate, which now found a new home in Cairo under the Mamlukes, and blasted by the devastation wrought by the Mongols, Baghdad survived as a second-rate city, but continued to take a share in the events of those turbulent times.

The Mongols could not hold the countries they had overrun, and their power was soon wrested from them by the Seljûks in Anatolia, and by others.

The Seljûk (Turk) empire of Rûm was divided up into ten provinces, ruled by as many different chiefs. Of these the house of Osman and that of Karaman were the most important, and they indulged in a long struggle for supremacy during the fourteenth century. At last the Osmanlis,

under Bayezid 1st, gained the upper hand and extended their rule at the expense of the Byzantine empire, but they were temporarily submerged by the wave of conquest of Timur (Tamerlane) of Samarcand.

Timur, like his great predecessor, Chingiz Khan, was a terrible destroyer. He carried out his campaigns with a ruthless disregard for life and property, and he instigated wholesale massacres of Christian communities. He conquered Transcaucasia and devastated Mesopotamia, so that Baghdad very wisely opened its gates to him in 1393. Unfortunately for herself, the city was ill-advised enough to revolt against the conqueror, with the result that he returned in 1401 and thoroughly sacked it. It is said that he put the inhabitants to the sword, save only the holy men, and

“90,000 skulls were piled up in pyramids before the walls.”

For the next hundred years Baghdad remained under the power of the Mongol dynasties, who had embraced the Shiah variety of the Moslem faith, but after the death of Timur the Osmanli Turks soon regained their supremacy in the West and rapidly extended their dominion in all directions. In 1517 the Osmanli chief Selim 1st took over the rights and insignia of the Caliphate from the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt, and it has remained an attribute of the Sultanate of Turkey ever since. His successor, Suleiman 1st, the great law-giver, turned his attention to Persia, and on his return marched back by the Hamadan route and took Baghdad, without resistance, in 1544.

Suleiman interested himself in the city

and in the neighbouring shrines, and re-discovered the bones of the Great Imam, the Sunni Abu Hanifah, and departed after a sojourn of four months. In 1602 the city was captured by the Persian, Shah Abbas the Great, but it was soon lost again to the Turks. In 1623 it once more fell into the hands of the Shah through the treachery of the son of the Turkish Commandant. Shah Abbas, as a punishment to the people, gave them over to the torture for a week, and was only diverted from a general massacre by the deception of the guardian of the Shrine of Hussain, who intervened on behalf of the Shiahhs (to which heresy the Shah belonged), and then reported large numbers of Sunnis as belonging to the Shiah sect.

But the ancient capital was given no

peace, for two years later it was besieged unsuccessfully for nine months by the Turks under Hafiz Pasha, and again unsuccessfully by Khosru Pasha in 1630. In 1638, however, the bloodthirsty Sultan himself, Murad IV., marched against it with a large army, and after a siege that lasted forty days captured it on Christmas Day of that year. In the time-honoured way the garrison and many thousands of the inhabitants were butchered, and Murad, with an eye to spectacular effect, “had the gratification of seeing a thousand executioners strike off a thousand heads at once.”

The city henceforth remained in Turkish hands, reduced to a comparatively unimportant place under a Pasha ; but it stood yet another siege in 1733 by the great warrior Nadir Shah, who failed to take

it, and it finally passed into the hands of the British under Maude on March 11, 1917, who was welcomed by a large section of population only too glad to be released from the domination of the unscrupulous Turk.

Baghdad is still a holy place to Mussulmans the world over, and the centre of a district rich in sacred shrines and remains revered alike by Sunnis and Shiah. Sixty miles away to the south-west, not far from old Babylon, is the tomb of the martyred Hussein, son of Ali and third Imam, contained in the great golden-domed mosque at Kerbela. Nejef or Meshed Ali, away to the south, is another most holy place, where Ali, son-in-law of Muhammed and first Imam, murdered at Kufa, lies buried in a beautiful and famous mosque. It is to these sacred cities, which form the

“Mecca” of the Shiah Mussulmans, that every Shiah comes on a pilgrimage once during his life if possible, and, if he can afford it, gets buried there. Kerbela and Nejef flourish on the gifts and fees of the faithful, and caravans of corpses from Persia and beyond are a common feature of the landscape on the mountain paths of Iran and in the plains of Mesopotamia.

Besides these two chief shrines there are those of four other Imams in the neighbourhood, and of many mystics and of Sunni doctors in the law, and the tombs of the prophets Esdras and Ezekiel, of Noah and of Adam himself, and many other relics of interest to Jews, Christians, and Moslems are pointed out in the plains of the two great rivers.

“Then there is the Cave (or Serdab, in the Mosque at Samara) into which the

twelfth and last Imam has vanished, and whence he will emerge before the Day of Judgment to preach in the pulpit that awaits him in the mosque of Gaur Shad at Meshed. There is also near ancient Babylon the well in which the fallen angels, Harut and Marut, hang head downwards until the Last Day, in punishment for trying to seduce the fair Anahid."

Thanks to the ravages of Hulagu and Timur, there is very little in the Baghdad of the present day to indicate its splendour of former days. There are no remains of the Palace of the Caliphs. The principal buildings are mosques, khans or caravanserais, and the Serai or Palace of the Pasha. There are over a hundred mosques, but only thirty or so with minarets. The oldest is that of Caliph Mustansir, of which only the minaret remains (1235); that of

Murjaneeya dates from the fourteenth century, and has some remains of old and very rich Arabesque work on its surface. The Mosque of the Vizier near the Tigris and the bridge of boats has a fine dome and a lofty minaret. The domes and the tops of minarets are mostly covered with green or turquoise-blue tiles, and stand out brilliantly against the dust-coloured brick of the surrounding buildings.

At the suburb of Kazimin, three miles away, is a fine mosque containing the tombs of the two Imams, Musa el Kazim, who was poisoned by Harun, and Hassan el Askari; it is an object of deep veneration to all Shiahs.

On the right bank in the old city is the tomb of Zobeide, the wife of Harun el Raschid. It is an octagonal brick structure surmounted by a lofty conical

dome, and built in 827, but since often restored.

Of the old brick walls of the city small portions remain, and the great fosse still exists. There still stands also the Bab-el-Tilsin, or Talismanic Gate, which was walled up after the surrender to Murad IV. It bears a fine Arabic inscription in relief on a scroll border around the tower, which bears the date 1220 A.D.

For the rest, Baghdad is a commonplace and somewhat dirty city, but there is every reason to think that, under a strong and settled government, that will encourage the Arabs once more to arise from their sloth and help in the reconstruction of their country, and that will rebuild its ancient irrigation channels, and harness the great rivers to the service of man, the city of the Caliphs will emerge from its decrepitude,

and as the centre of a rich and flourishing district, capable of producing unlimited quantities of fruit and corn, take an honourable place once more amongst the great cities of the world.

Already one barrage has been built on the Euphrates, and Sir W. Willcox's plans for the development of a huge irrigation scheme await but the necessary capital to bring it into being. Canal colonies from Iraq or India would follow the water and reap rich harvests from the generous alluvial soil, which can produce anything from grain of all sorts and dates to peaches and pomegranates.

The Baghdad Railway lacks but a few hundred furlongs to make complete an iron road from Basra to Konia. Add branch lines from Baghdad towards Kermanshah, Kerbela, and Hit, and from Kut to Nas-

ryah, and Baghdad will become once more an extremely important centre of commerce between India and Persia and the North, and will regain much of the trade of those parts which it formerly held before it was diverted to Northern Persia and Erzerum.

Though it can never repay us for the loss of the thousands of good lives that have been spent in winning it, yet it is to be hoped that so potentially rich a country will be made to yield a goodly return to the sons of those who laid down their lives in its acquisition.

## XVII.

## PRISONERS IN BAGHDAD.

IT was an unkind fate that landed us at the British Consulate—now no longer a Consulate, but a hospital. It is a fine new building, and we felt that for once the dignity of Britain had been upheld by a structure fitting her prestige.

The order came for all officers to disembark—officers only, none of other ranks, and no baggage. This was soon done, and we stepped ashore, wondering if we should ever see our kit again. We stood about in groups for a few minutes, or competed for a place in the shade of the very few young trees that lined the walk up to the

main steps leading to a handsome terrace in front of the building, the while we watched, with a very natural interest, the confabulations of the Turkish officers, who seemed to be arranging our future movements. Soon we were lined up in order of seniority, and, a few minutes later, to our surprise and not a little amusement, were marched off, very slowly, at a most funereal pace, into the town, headed by the senior Colonel and tailed by the junior Jemadar. We lacked but reversed muskets to complete the illusion that we were following our own funeral. Passing through the garden at the back of the Consulate, we debouched into one of the outer streets of the city, and so into the midst of an interested throng of eager sightseers, who had evidently been warned of the advent of the captured British.

So we found ourselves the cynosure of

all eyes, and realised that we were to be shown to the multitude as the tit-bit of the Turkish Triumph.

As we slowly wound along a bend in the road, I looked back at the caterpillar-like column of British and Indian officers, and it was indeed no small “bag” that the Turks had secured; they could be pardoned for showing us off to their none too affectionate subjects in the ancient city of Baghdad.

What an interminable march that was! At two miles an hour or less we slowly wound our way along the streets, which were lined with a gaping populace and kept clear by the attendant military.

From the first-floor windows many a fair face studied with interest the captured Anglais, and some of them were pretty enough with their fair skins and plaits of glossy black hair. But the people said

never a word, and their silence in the sunshine intensified the solemn nature of the proceeding. We saw it had to be got through, so we smoked a cigarette and took stock of the town and its storks.

It was very hot, and no one was sorry when we at length reached the cool shade of the vaulted bazars in the middle of the city. These, like the rest of the route, had been swept clear of traffic, and their open-fronted shops were piled high with the merchants and their friends, amongst the generous jumble of their miscellaneous wares. Half a mile of these, and we emerged once more into the fierce sunlight, passed the Infantry Barracks, and marched out of the city by the north gate; down a slope on the Meidan, past a lake of flood water, and so at long-last to the Cavalry Barracks and our destination, some  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from our starting-point.

Hungry and thirsty, we were told there would be breakfast at noon, but it was nearer three o'clock when we got it—a mess of thin soup, vegetables, and some eggs,—and then it was a scramble.

Another meal was prepared for us at about seven o'clock in the evening, by the contractor to whom the job of feeding us had been handed over, and we ate it at small tables set in the open in the barrack square. We paid a “mejidieh” a day (about 3s. 8d.) for our “board.”

The accommodation in the barracks was limited, and we lay on the floor in rows, cheek by jowl with each other; but some of us were wise enough to sleep on the roof at night, and so escape the sandflies that came out in thousands down below.

The next day a few of us got out for a walk accompanied by a guard. Some went to see the American Consul; we of

the medical persuasion went to the Central Military Hospital to look up friend Abdul Kadir. Him we found in his bacteriological laboratory looking lovingly down a microscope, which was part of a very complete and workmanlike field-service Bacteriological outfit of Austrian make. He introduced us to the Commandant and to another physician, gave us coffee and cigarettes, and then he showed us over the place. He took us in to see some British officers and men who had been captured from Aylmer's Force. The officers were in a small ward which was clean and bright, and which they shared with some Turks. There were Tranquil with a broken thigh, Watson, and Gasson the flying man ; they all looked pretty bad. They said the Turks treated them well, but they were full of gratitude to some French Sisters of Mercy who frequently visited them, bringing them fruit

and jam and other delicacies from their Convent. The men were in a larger general ward, and seemed to be treated in the same way as the Turkish soldiers, and to be more or less contented. The hospital appeared to be clean and well kept; it is a large building arranged around an extensive quadrangle or garden, full of orange trees, vines, figs, and the like, amongst which are cut paths in all directions. Convalescents were wandering about amongst the trees and flowers enjoying the fresh air and gentle exercise.

Abdul Kadir informed us that four out of the five of our own particular party were to remain in Baghdad to look after the sick and wounded; the fifth would accompany the rest of the officers going north.

For four days we remained in the Cavalry Barracks. One evening somebody got up an impromptu concert which went on un-

molested for some time, until in the middle of “Glorious Devon” or “Widdicombe Fair”—I forget which—the little Turkish officer who had been left in charge of us for the night suddenly conceived the idea that we were singing Russian Turcophobe songs, and ordered a cessation of the proceedings. This annoyed our senior, Colonel D—, who strongly objected to doing any such thing, and ordered the artists of the moment to continue.

There ensued, therefore, a most lively altercation for twenty minutes, conducted in a mixture of French and English by the Colonel and an interpreting Staff officer on the one hand, and by the Turk and his assistant on the other. Things began to look awkward, and it seemed there would be a row, but explanations finally prevailed and the concert continued.

At the end of four days we were sud-

denly ordered to pack up and move off to the station, with not more than 60 kilos of stuff for a Field officer and not more than 30 for one below that rank. The result was a hasty scrapping of kit, and a crowd of Jewish and Arab scallywag merchants who swarmed among us reaped a rich harvest. The commandant of the "Place" had received no orders about the medicals, but in the nick of time we got hold of Abdul Kadir, who arranged matters, and four of us—for Lancelot had tossed with Horace for a place, and lost—stayed behind with three or four other officers who were too ill to move. The rest of them lined up and started on their journey into the unknown. With a lump in our throat we watched them move off to the station, and wondered how many of them we should ever see again. The same evening we who were left, and the sick officers, were taken

off by our friend Abdul,—the sick to be installed in Turkish hospitals, ourselves to be shown new quarters. Our kit and servants followed in carts. Two of these carts were full of stuff belonging to officers who had gone north. The American Consul had promised to look after any superfluous kit they could send him. A Turkish guard was told off to go with it, and we did our best to keep an eye on it, but it never rolled up, and our inquiries the next day only elicited shrugs of the shoulders. To our surprise, we ourselves, instead of being deposited at once in our new abode, were taken along to a restaurant, where on a balcony overlooking the Tigris we were presented to the Médecin-en-chef and other M.O.'s, and then dined by them as their guests.

Fifty or sixty other officers were dining there—Germans, Turks, Arabs, Austrians, and a Swede or two.

The Turks were attentive hosts, and the scene under such novel conditions was an interesting one. At its conclusion the Médicin-en-chef of the group of hospitals to which we were to belong, conducted us through what appeared to be a maze of mediæval alleys by the light of a candle-lamp to our lodging, where we were glad to find our orderlies already installed.

The next morning we endeavoured to go out to the restaurant for breakfast, as we had been informed we might do, but to our chagrin we found that we were in the hands of a jailor who by no means agreed to our going. Persuasion and argument were equally useless with the stupid old Arab “dug-out” who was now our “director,” and all we could get out of him was permission for a servant to go out and purchase food, since he offered us none himself. For two days we couldn’t get

out of the place, and then the restriction was as suddenly removed as it had been imposed. The house we were in was fitted up as a hospital, filled with rough wooden beds covered with mattresses, and ready for our sick when they should arrive, but it boasted no drugs or instruments, which we had to indent for in the smallest quantities when required. It belonged to the École des Sœurs—the French Dominican Sisters, whose convent was close by, and whose headquarters establishment is at Tours. Our house was a two-storied building with a flat roof, and a central courtyard about 25 feet square, out of which opened the rooms of the basement and a staircase up to the verandahed first floor. The lower rooms or “serdabs” were below the level of the courtyard—three steps down; they are to be found in all Baghdad houses, and are used in the hot weather for living in.

Fresh air is conducted down to them by long chimneys, the tops of which project above the roof in the form of a cowl facing the direction of the prevailing north wind, and they are very much cooler than the upper rooms.

The house-top slightly overhangs the rest of the building, with the result that it nearly touches those of other houses. These, when we went up in the evening to take the air, we found occupied by a crowd of Baghdadis—Jews, Chaldeans, Syrians,—all Christians, and all smiling all over at us, offering us fruit and cigarettes, and eager to greet us with a “Good morning, howwaryou?”

We found ourselves, in effect, living in the middle of the Christian quarter, the inhabitants of which spared no pains, when the Turks were not looking, to impress on us their whole-hearted sympathy with the

Allied cause. Most of the men spoke French; a good many of them who had been employed in the offices of the English firms, also English; the women, with one or two exceptions, only Arabic.

The Christian quarter is of very considerable extent, and contains a large number of well-built and commodious houses belonging to well-to-do people, who, I should think, monopolise the commercial business of the city.

There are practically no streets worth the name through it, but only narrow alleys which wind about in all directions. As the upper stories generally overhang the lower, the tops of the houses approximate to each other, so that but little sunlight finds its way into the lanes.

They reminded one of prints of Old London before the great fire. Each house boasts a heavy wooden door with a large

brass knocker thereon, and as there are no external windows on the ground floor, each forms a sort of self-contained stronghold. The necessary air space is got in the courtyard inside and, of course, on the roof, which takes the place of a garden. This type of house is doubtless a very necessary one, where not only is space limited but where a citizen holding fast to one faith is liable at short notice to be butchered by those holding another.

The important part religion plays in the daily life of the people in this part of the world was often brought home to one in the most casual of remarks. One would ask a man who he was, and would inevitably get the answer, "I'm a Christian," or "I'm a Mussulman," as the case might be. "Who is he?" "Oh, he's a Mussulman!" Never would the man's name or

occupation be given, but always the central fact of his existence—so it seemed—his religion! The vital importance, to the individual, of a man's creed was impressed upon us again and again, and one came to realise how much a matter of life and death one's choice of a method of going to heaven might become at any moment.

They are well off for churches, and there are a couple of Bishops—a Syrian and a Chaldean—one of whom we had the pleasure of meeting. There is also a large French Convent with an establishment of thirty or forty Dominican Sisters. The Chaldean church is a large building surmounted by a dome like a miniature St Peter's, and was close to our hospital of the École des Sœurs. We were allowed to attend service there if we wished, and

our “director” himself took some of us there to attend Mass soon after our arrival. At the service, which was similar to a Mass in Europe, all the women sat together in the fore-part of the church and the men behind.

The women dress in semi-European fashion without the hat, but each wears a sort of flowing silk robe or large cape, which is worn over the head rather like an Indian “sari.” Their shoes are of the high-heeled variety, but have “uppers” over the fore-part of the foot only, and they are well made.

The men wear ordinary European clothing topped by the Turkish tarboosh. Very few of them were taken for military service by the Turks save as assistants in hospitals and offices, but they had to pay a heavy annual fee for their exemption, and as

practically all their trade was at a stand-still they were feeling the war acutely.

There are many thousands of Christians in Baghdad, including a good many Arabs, and during the whole of our stay in Baghdad these people lost no opportunity of talking to us when they could do so unobserved ; they expressed their sorrow at our failure to reach Baghdad six months before, and hoped that it would not be long before the tables were turned.

“ We are sorry to see you as prisoners. You were so close to us at Ctesiphon ; we could hear the guns and were delighted to think the English were coming. But they *will* come, won’t they ? When will it be ? in a week or two, a month, two months ? They are good and kind, the English ; they ought to take Baghdad,” and so on. We assured them the English *would* come,

perhaps in a month or two, perhaps longer, but they certainly would drive the Turk back and capture the city!

This friendliness of the Christian community was so pronounced at times as to be almost embarrassing, and we feared to get them into trouble by talking to them too much. Our old Arab “director” interfered at times and waved us apart, but he himself was a Christian and so was none too strict.

After a couple of days we overcame his objections to our going out, and got away for a *petit déjeuner* at the Restaurant “Tigre.” Horace and I revelled in the freshness of the early morning, sitting on the vine-clad balcony overhanging the great river, and it seemed good to be alive again. Now and again small row-boats would pass up or down the stream

carrying Turkish or German officers, sitting under a small awning, or a “Qufa” or coracle would float down-stream full to the brim with green water-melons. Three hundred yards above us lay the only boat-bridge connecting the two banks; the far bank was lined with balconied houses built on the wall at the river brink, and people could be seen in them taking their morning tea or coffee on the little verandahs. Just opposite, a gap in the row of houses was occupied by a palm garden, and to its left, above the trees, could be seen the high water tower belonging to the German railway terminus.

The restaurant proprietor was all for the “Entente”; though he had lived all his life in Baghdad, he looked more Italian than anything else. When no one was near he would come and talk to us freely,

but when Germans were present he would be content with a few “asides.” He would take any sort of money from us, he said, or none at all if we were short, and he appeared to tolerate with difficulty his German patrons. Later on, when all restrictions on our movements were removed, we got into the habit of dining there twice a week, besides an occasional breakfast. Leaving the restaurant we explored the Bazars, and as we were walking therein we came across a large crowd, which we discovered was watching the marching into the city of our Indian troops, who had just arrived. They marched by, each carrying a small bundle of kit. Despite their fatigue, they came in well and at a good pace, and their faces were expressionless, or melancholic; doubtless it was “Kismet.” But in a few moments I turned away; it was

too sad to see those splendid fellows in the hands of the Philistines !

The main Bazars are two or three covered-in streets, with low vaulted roofs, running parallel to the river, in the middle of the city,—they are more like tunnels than anything else, with cubicles on each side for shops. They are just wide enough for two fiacres to pass each other, and are smelly and stuffy. At night, with dirty lamps placed at rare intervals on the walls, and deserted save for a watchman or two, they are weird and ghostly places, like a cathedral crypt.

The goldsmiths' and silversmiths' Bazars form a series or rather maze of the tiniest little alleys, in which it is easy to get lost. In them we saw very little good work ; nearly all of it was cheap and badly-made jewellery, such as one saw worn by the

Arab women ; but perhaps their best stuff was hidden away. In Baghdad as a city we were vastly disappointed ; it has no imposing buildings save its various barracks, and the town is very commonplace.

Our freedom was short-lived, for we were soon shut up again for another day or two, after which the other boat with the sick and wounded arrived, and we soon had work to do.

The “*École des Sœurs*” house and another were filled up, and some hundreds more were dumped down on a bare piece of land near the station, with Trixie and others to look after them. It was a bad place. Save for a few bits of rush matting and a tent or two, there was no protection for the men from the sun, which by now was appallingly hot in the middle of the day ; no sanitation, and insufficient water. Here they remained for two or three

weeks, but every few days those thought fit enough were sifted out and sent up country in batches, sometimes accompanied by a medical officer, and sometimes without.

The American Consul, Mr Brissl, visited this camp almost daily, and worked hard to ameliorate the dreadful conditions our men were living in there. He supplied money ; he bought sheep for them ; had beds made for the sick, and helped in a hundred ways. He looked after the cemetery, and arranged for the Christian burial of those who died. He was indefatigable all through that hot summer, frequently visited us to talk things over with the Colonel, lent us books, and did us all good by his cheery presence. He and Trixie became great friends, and got through a lot of work in connection with the camp. We owed him much.

As beds became vacant in the hospitals the number of sick in the camp was gradu-

ally reduced, and the whole camp was later on removed to a much more satisfactory and shady site near the river, where the men could bathe and laze beneath the palms.

A few days later six of us were moved out of the “*École*” and quartered in the Artillery Barracks—sometimes called the Citadel—near the North Gate, and abutting on the old and ruined wall of the city, where we were soon joined by the Colonel, who had at last arrived from Shamran. Here we had an upper room, which was desperately hot in the daytime and full of sandflies at night. It overlooked the great barrack square, where the training of small bodies of men in gun drill, and of cadets in sword practice, was constantly going on. The barracks are built around three sides of this square, whilst on the fourth or river side are workshops and two or three maga-

zines. We occupied rooms just to the left of the main gate as you go in, and between us and the nearest magazine at the corner, some fifty yards away, the barracks were used as a hospital, full of sick and wounded Turks. Soon after we got there the ground floor of this part was handed over to us for a hospital, which we filled up with men from the camp. From here two of us were told off to look after a lot of British and Indian men who were accommodated in a large hospital run by the Turkish Red Crescent Society. They were mostly men who belonged to the relief force, and had been prisoners for various periods from three weeks to as many months.

They were very glad to see us and to be treated by their own doctors. Our coming, they told us presently, made a great difference to the attitude of the

Turkish orderlies towards them; for whereas before our arrival some of the orderlies were inclined to knock our men about a good deal, and to be brutal on occasion, they now showed them much more consideration.

They had a fair amount of food: milk, and sour milk or “*lait caillé*,” a popular morning dish in Baghdad, rice, bread, and a vegetable stew with a trace of meat in it. Most of them missed the meat, of which they got scarcely any, but a good many got to like the diet. The brown bread was coarse and a little sour, and several of the sick men couldn’t digest it, so we always purchased some loaves of white bread on our way to hospital for them, and generally also some extra cigarettes. Both these little luxuries they appreciated very much, and they made them feel they were being looked after.

Our dealings with the bread-woman and the cigarette shop were usually watched by a small crowd of interested natives, who followed us with curious glances as we turned away with our arms and pockets full of loaves and packets.

The chief surgeon of this hospital was one Kanin Bey, who before the war had been the “civil surgeon” of Baghdad, and still looked after the large municipal hospital on the other side of the river, which also took in many wounded.

He was thus acquainted with the members of the British colony in peace time. He was an intelligent Turk, had travelled a good deal, and had received his medical education in Paris; he was under no illusions regarding the position of Turkey, and saw that whichever way the war went she would gain nothing. He was a good surgeon, easily the best of the few I saw.

Most of them seemed unsympathetic in their manner to their patients, and rough in their treatment and work generally. The hospital storekeeper was a horse-dealer, who spent much of his time in Bombay and was a constant visitor to the Poona races ; but now his business had gone, and he divided his time between his store cupboards and his hubble-bubble !

The hospital boasted a Turkish bath, which we were invited to use whenever we liked, and we were able to order an occasional bath for our patients, who very much appreciated it. The attendant, Abdullah, was a friendly old Arab, whose ministrations were always most grateful and comforting. A most atrocious Turkish brass band played here about twice a week, but it cheered the men up a bit ; it went round to most or all of the hospitals in town,

played for a few minutes and then moved on. Its headquarters seemed to be the Infantry Barracks or the neighbouring "Serai," where all the army offices were, and it was here that it played the gems of its limited répertoire.

We soon settled down to a sort of dull daily routine which tried our nerves and our patience, accompanied as it was for some time by irritating restrictions on our movements. Week after week we were promised "exchange soon," but as often were disappointed. The weather was terribly hot; we worked from an early hour till about midday as a rule, and then "existed" from one to five in our room in the scantiest of attire and prayed for sundown. Rumours of the tragic fate of large numbers of our men who were overcome by the heat on the marches up beyond the railhead at

Samara reached us, and two of our number were despatched up the line to help.

General Melliss, who had remained in Baghdad sick for two or three weeks, recovered and departed north with his staff, and with Gaspard as medical attendant.

Of news we got little that we could trust. From the Christian side the most optimistic rumours reached us, whilst in the only paper that Baghdad boasted, printed in French and Arabic, we saw the description of events according to the German side. From the one we heard that Lord Kitchener had come out to Busra ; from the other, a few days later, we heard that he had been drowned. For long, of course, we believed neither, till the very insistence of the latter forced itself into our minds and we feared it must be true. At the restaurant and elsewhere we often conversed with Turks.

The fall of Erzerum they would never acknowledge, but from a doctor who was there I heard something of the sufferings they went through. Typhus raged there apparently, and they must have lost thousands of men ; for of doctors alone, according to my informant, they lost a hundred, he himself only just recovering. One interesting Turk was a most enthusiastic officer in the Turkish Mission to Persia. His eyes sparkled as he spoke of what they meant to do there. "Persia is ours," he would say, "and so is India by rights, for she is Mussulman and should be ruled by Constantinople, and one day we shall get her." He ignored the millions of Hindus, or knew little about them, and was quite persuaded that they would brush aside the British resistance. He departed for Persia a few days afterwards, and I have often wondered

what has happened to him since and how he has taken the breaking of his dream.

Their views on the Armenian massacres were amusing. I asked one of them how he justified their appalling treatment of these people. “Why do you butcher them?” I said. Ingenuously he replied, “But of course we kill them; they are revolutionaries and anarchists and are always giving us trouble; the only way, naturally, is to exterminate them. Besides, what are *you* doing in Ireland?” Of Germans there was a fair number in Baghdad,—perhaps a hundred or so officers and half a battalion of pioneers, also half a dozen nursing sisters, and a few Austrians. Many of them and of the Turkish officers wore the Gallipoli campaign ribbon, and not a few had the Iron Cross. The Germans kept very much to themselves, and it was a rare thing to see Turks and

Germans chatting together. The Turks themselves, strangely enough, did not hesitate to intimate to us their dislike of the Teuton. A short time before we left most of the Germans disappeared ; they had, it was said, gone off to Persia.

One day, just as we had shut ourselves up to get through the heat of the day, a loud explosion was heard. It sounded like another midday gun, but we lost no time in going outside to investigate. Smoke was issuing from the magazine at the corner, and within a minute or so another bang, and another larger irruption of smoke and dust occurred. And now we heard the rattle of small-arms ammunition ; explosion followed explosion in increasing violence until it sounded like a furious battle going on within a few yards of us. We hastily dressed, told our men to pack up, and went outside and down the steps

to the hospital to get the men clear. A Turk rushed in and told us all to clear out as fast as we could. Then came the biggest explosion of all, which nearly brought the place down, and the end of the barracks nearest the magazine began to burn merrily. There was a wild stampede of the Turkish sick and wounded from the upper rooms, down the steps and out by the gate. Bits of shell, shrapnel, twisted muskets, and *débris* of all sorts were raining down on to the roof and in the barrack square. Hell seemed let loose, and shells and small-arm stuff continued to burst in every direction for another exciting half-hour. One shell landed in the hospital on the other side of the river, and there were several casualties in the town. A Turkish sergeant ran round to a mosque a quarter of a mile away, had it opened, and told us to take up our quarters therein for

the time being ; and a very hot afternoon we spent in moving all our patients and kit thither. As was not surprising, a couple of poor fellows who were very ill succumbed to the exertion of moving, and for two days we camped out in the church-yard in a very uncomfortable condition. But on the third day they placed another house at our disposal for our personnel and sick, and ourselves they put once more into our old quarters in the Cavalry Barracks in the "maidan." Here we were more comfortable, though it was extremely hot,—the thermometer once or twice reached 114° in our room ; but there was a good big flat roof, and the cool nights made up for a lot. There were a good many Turkish cavalry officers quartered there, and we soon got to know them, and even on occasion rode out with them. The commandant, a bimbashi, a swashbuckling soldier with fifteen

years' campaigning to his credit, was a very good fellow, and treated us uncommonly well; “whilst we are actually fighting you,” he would say, “it is *à l'outrance*, but the fight once decided and you in our hands, you are our guests; I treat you as my own officers.”

From the roof of the barracks we had a very good view of the country round: two main roads passed by it,—one along by the river to Kazimin and Mosul; the other, merely a track over the desert, led away north-eastwards to Khanikin and Kerman-shah. Along the latter we constantly saw troops and munitions pass on their way to meet the Russians. One day, for instance, forty motor-lorries from Germany arrived in Baghdad from the North, and passed by us on their way to Khanikin. The Turks were sending every available man to push the Bear back, for the

Russians got very near at one time, within a few miles, and one felt the uneasiness and subdued excitement in the city.

Our chief consolation in life at this time was the abundance of fruit and vegetables that were obtainable in Baghdad. The oranges were over, but there was a profusion of every other kind of fruit: nectarins, grapes, apples, plums, figs, melons, and pears grew in plenty, and were to be had in the markets.

Otherwise life was none too pleasing, and we sometimes envied the fellows who had gone north into a cooler climate, for our exchange seemed to come no nearer, and we began to give it up as a bad job. Slowly the numbers of our men decreased; some died, and some were discharged fit for the journey to Mosul. We had great difficulty in fitting out the latter, for most of them had little or nothing in the way

of clothes, or of such necessary equipment as water-bottles and canteens. Several of them had been stripped on the battlefield and had arrived in hospital in nothing but a shirt. But we got hold of the kits of deceased men after considerable argument, and by the addition of small purchases of shoes or cooking-pots managed to fix up most of them fairly satisfactorily, and to give them a few piastres to go on with. The American Red Cross people cheered us mightily one day by sending T£3 to each British officer, and T£1 to each British soldier who was a prisoner in Baghdad. We appreciated this most highly (notwithstanding the fact that the Turks paid us in paper which was worth about three-fifths of its face value), and were touched by the kindly thought of the society which sent us help from their friendly country 10,000 miles away.

## XVIII.

## EXCHANGED !

BUT all things come to an end sooner or later, and our imprisonment was no exception to the rule. One day, when we had just about given up all hope of getting away, the news came that ten out of the eleven doctors in Baghdad were to be exchanged ; the eleventh, the Colonel, was to stay behind as a hostage against the return of an important Turkish doctor. But still better things were in store for us, for the Colonel made further inquiries, and, thanks to Brissl and Khalil Pasha, the order was amended, with the result that eleven doctors (including three sick), eleven combatant

officers who were in hospital, and three hundred odd sick men, were now told to go. It was almost too good to be true, and we trembled lest something should go wrong and upset all arrangements; but nothing did, and on August 8th we embarked on the old *Khalifa* once more, had it all to ourselves, and weighed anchor for Kut. A goodly number of sick, together with three medicos, including Horace, Pearson, and Clifford, were also brought down from Samarah, and we thought they were to be released with us; but just before we started a Turkish deputation came on board, re-examined the men, and picked out fifty whom they considered too fit to be exchanged, so these poor devils were again disembarked and sent back to camp with the three M.O.'s. For those poor men this last act of cruel disappointment must have been almost too much to bear. We were very sick about it, but could not prevent it.

A splendid bit of “eyewash” on the part of the Turks was perpetrated just before we left. To our surprise and amusement they brought on board a lot of new boots, with which they fitted every man who had none or no good ones, just to show our people down below how well they looked after their prisoners! whilst during the whole time of our stay in Baghdad we could not get boots out of them for love or money for the men who had to march up country, and in several instances men were despatched on their travels without. When we remonstrated with them, they would say that their own men often went without too, which was true enough, but they were doubtless used to it.

We started away at last and dropped down the stream, but we hadn't got clear of the suburbs before we stuck on a sandbank for some hours. We were in a fever of impatience to get off again, for we were desperately afraid that the Turks would

change their minds and recall us before we got well away.

However, nothing happened, and we pursued our way. It took us seven days to do the two days' journey to Kut. The river was low, and we investigated the adhesive power of every submerged mud-flat in that hundred miles of tortuous waterway. The sense of approaching freedom and the fresh air of the desert put new life into us, and despite the meagre diet of rice and vegetables we put on weight. At length we reached Shamran and tied up at the left bank, close to a Turkish hospital camp and within sight of old Kut and its minaret once more.

Here we quite expected to wait a day or two whilst they arranged our transfer, but no one was prepared for another three weeks of suspense on board that beastly boat.

But there we stayed day after day, counting the hours, playing bridge, watching British aeroplanes sail over us once more as of old in Kut, wondering what the delay was about, and being unutterably bored. We never got off that boat for a solid month ; we fed on rice and beans and lady's fingers, bread and soup, twice a day ; soup and beans and rice—dates and eggs when we could get them—until we began to dread the sight of those piled-up plates of greasy rice.

Haider Bey came to see us every few days, and sometimes some doctors of our acquaintance or a flying man or two. Haider seemed invariably to tell us that the exchange was practically fixed up, but that he could not get the final answer—to something—from our people down below. What that something was we could only guess ; they were, we felt sure, trying to

drive too hard a bargain with General Maude. Whatever it was, we were convinced we could never count ourselves safe until we actually set foot on British ship or soil ; for by now we knew our Turk, and knew that words are nothing to him save a vehicle for fooling or soothing the man he is dealing with. Truth in the abstract does not exist for him. One day Haider and his friends brought us an ice machine, with a great show of “doing us well,” but the ice machine was a “frost”; it would not work, and I am quite convinced that they knew it would not before they took the trouble to have a couple of hundredweight of useless glass and iron carted along to our saloon !

But the negotiations did come to an end ; steam was got up once more one night. We were given strict orders to arise next morning at three o’clock—we were all sleep-

ing on deck—and to remain in our cabins thereafter; we were ordered to give up all gold we might possess, and all our kit was inspected and our papers and letters examined. All night long, it seemed, they were putting up canvas screens all around the decks, rendering opaque all cabin windows, and hermetically sealing them, so that the place became like an oven. Sure enough at 4.30 A.M. we started on our last jaunt, and moved off down the stream. The plunging and cranking of those noisy ship's engines was the sweetest music I have ever heard. We were to meet a British Hospital ship near Megasis, so they said. Soon we were slipping past Kut, and just got a peep at its ruined front as we went by, and shortly afterwards passed the point on the right bank to which our army had then advanced. Thence for miles we sailed through a no man's land

between the British lines on the right bank and the enemy's lines on the left,—a most interesting lane to pass along. All was deadly still—hostilities were in abeyance for our journey through ; here and there we saw a head or two on one or other side, till at length we passed Megasis and saw, with a joy that words will not describe, a little two-decked sternwheeler approaching us and flying the Red Cross flag. That little ship, canvas-covered, hideous though it was, was symbolic of all that makes life possible,—of Home, and Love, and Beauty ; of the might and majesty of the British Raj ; of liberty to come and go : it spelt “ freedom ” and the thought of “ freedom.” The knowledge that it was all over at last, that we were to be free men once more, was almost too great for words ; it left us dumb.

In a remarkably short space of time we

were anchored alongside each other. The exchanged Turks were the first to be passed over, and they were soon all aboard the *Khalifa*, whilst we lost no time in setting foot on the dear old *Sikkim*. We shook hands heartily with Haider and Dr Hassan, the same ship's doctor we had gone up with four months before, and from the bridge of the *Sikkim* waved them a cheery good-bye. As the good ships separated, and the Turks went "up" and we went "down," we turned with a sigh of contentment into the little saloon, looked at the white cloth and the marmalade, and smelt the bacon and eggs ; whilst Trixie, voicing the sentiments of us all, sat himself down at the laden board, and with knife in one hand and fork in the other, exclaimed, "Gad ! I've been waiting for this for a y-e-a-r !"

## XIX.

## DOWN THE RIVER.

Down stream we paddled without further delay, but in a few minutes we reached a spot at Sanaiyat opposite the opposing lines on the left bank. Here we stopped to drop the Turkish officer who had accompanied the ship from this point upwards to see that no intelligence officer of ours took an undue amount of interest in the enemy's arrangements on the left bank. From the boat we enfiladed, so to speak, the advanced trenches of both Turk and Englishman, which were here only thirty yards or so apart.

In the one we could see a Turk or two peeping round the corner, whilst in the other we caught sight of a Tommy's cork helmet. On the foreshore of the no man's land between the two was a tangle of barbed wire down to and in the water. All was very still. No one spoke, and the silence was only broken by the sound of the oars in the rowlocks of the little boat that was working its way over to the bank.

As it reached the shelving shore the Turk stepped out just below the end of the British trench and proceeded in the direction of his own line. Walking along the foreshore amidst a silence that could be felt, he looked horribly lonely and unprotected. All knew that, hidden in the ground all around him were thousands of invisible armed men only waiting for the

dropping of the little flag of truce which protected this lone man from all harm, to be at each other's throats again. Although one knew both sides were quiet by arrangement, yet one almost held one's breath as he neared his lines and the safety of mother earth, but safe beneath the truce he clambered leisurely up the steep bank, stepped over a barrier of sandbags, and disappeared in the trench on the other side.

So again nothing was to be seen save the little cuts in the bank which marked the open ends of the two hostile trenches, and it remained but for us to get out of the way to allow hostilities to be resumed.

No time was lost in doing this, and we who had escaped from prison took no risks of offending a jealous God by glancing backwards towards the land we had left,

but looked forward with the interest of those coming Home to see what changes had taken place in our absence.

Much had been done in a twelvemonth. Round every fresh bend of the river, so it seemed, we came upon a huge camp of white canvas glistening in the sun, or upon smaller rest camps or supply dumps, trim and tidy, and protected by a machine-gun or two against marauding Arabs. At Sheikh Sa'ad we found hospitals and old friends, from whom we got a first instalment of a year's arrears of "personal notes," and we simply devoured all the papers we could get hold of.

Amarah we scarcely recognised, so great were the changes and additions. Acres of new hatted hospitals peeped out from amongst the palm groves on the right bank, with, strangest of all, the white

uniforms of nursing sisters dotted about here and there—the first we had seen in Mesopotamia—transforming the rough man's world with their civilising influence; monitors galore, it seemed, with their tall wireless masts and their polished guns; P. boats, numbered in three figures, where a year ago they had scarcely reached two; mountains of stores piled along the front on the left bank, and over all an air of settled activity which only Busra boasted in the old days. It looked as if the British army had come to stay!

But we spent only a night at Amarah, just long enough to despatch a cable Home, and were off again early next morning. The same signs of activity presented themselves on the way down: here a good view of the new road, there a glimpse of a bit of railway with, wonder of wonders, a small

railway engine ; past Ezra's tomb and on to Kurna. Only once did we hit a sand-bank, so that we made a record voyage to Busra. Old Busra hadn't changed much ; it was perhaps a little busier, and a few more hospital huts had sprung up, and there were nurses there, but otherwise it was just the same.

With great good luck we got in a few minutes before the arrival of a dainty Hospital ship, the old *Varsova*, which had taken on new functions since last we saw her as a B. I. transport, and on her, as we were all more or less seedy, we were all forthwith embarked, to our great content.

With a joy unspeakable, and a relief words could not express, we found ourselves slipping along that avenue of palms *en route* for Bombay. Despite their beauty, we felt that we never wanted to see those

date groves again ; rather did we say farewell—so we hoped—with an infinite satisfaction to the desert land where we had left only two good years of our life, measured by the standards of Time, but a good ten by those of our feelings.

THE END.



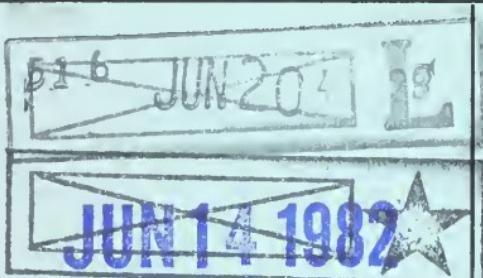
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